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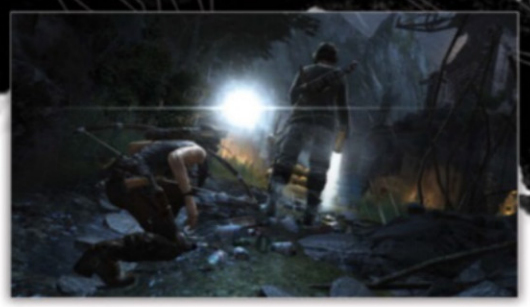
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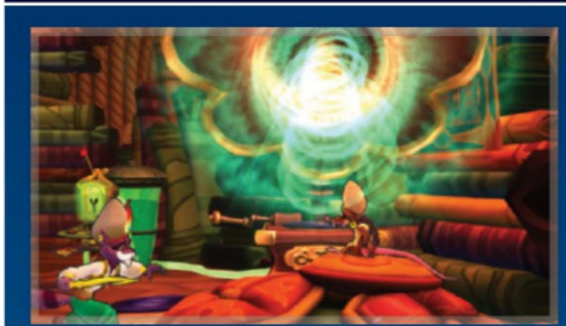
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EXCLUSIVELY ON YOUR DISC



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We run down the year's exclusive Sony games on your beautiful PS3, including *The Last Of Us*, *Beyond* and other titles.

DEVIL MAY CRY RETRO VIDEO

We revisit the first three *Devil May Cry* games as *DmC* lands on our doorstep. The second one is still rubbish. Oh well.



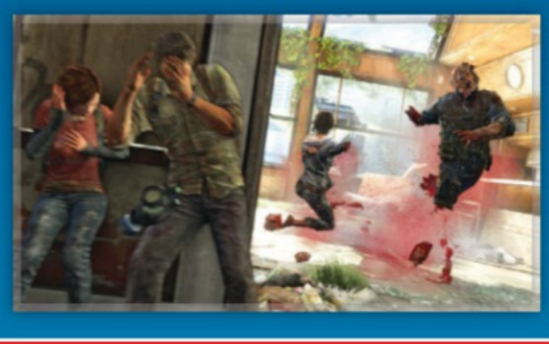


VIDEO REVIEWS OF BIG GAMES

We reviewed a few games via video this month, including *Battlefield*'s *Aftermath* DLC, *Far Cry 3* and the awful *Family Guy* game.

ALL THE LATEST TRAILERS

Rounding up footage on the latest games. There's still a lot to come on PS3 that we're excited about, before the PS4 finally gets here.



SEE THE BACK PAGE FOR MORE!

LARA CROFT REBORN

We get a first-hand look at Crystal Dynamics' Tomb Raider reboot, both single and multiplayer, while the team talks us through Lara's trial by fire in a terrifying new world...

The long-awaited reboot of *Tomb Raider* is the first full Lara Croft game since late 2008. While we had *The Guardian Of Light* on PSN in the meantime, this is the one we've been waiting for: Crystal Dynamics, re-examining a flagging series, and electing that the best way to make us care about Ms Croft again is to show us exactly how she came to be. This is her origin story, her equivalent of Crime Alley in Batman – the place that shapes her into the icon as we understand her. *Tomb Raider* is the ultimate gauntlet for the young Lara Croft: shipwrecked on an island where her friends have been captured, and forced to survive in a horrifying wilderness filled with scavengers and other shady characters. Lara's rebirth comes from learning to tackle these elements.

"We knew it was a risk showing this very strong, iconic female games character in a situation where she didn't start strong and felt uncertain and scared, because people like to see strong female characters," says writer Rhianna Pratchett. "It was risky. People weren't certain at the start of this, and there was a lot of talk about us breaking Lara. I don't think we've broken her; we've rewound her to the point that the traits that are 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider' are there, but buried beneath the surface, so that they can bubble out during the game, so she can discover herself as well. That's quite powerful."

It's a real counterpoint to the old interpretation of Lara Croft, an inexplicably proportioned character who hails from a time when a videogame protagonist was little more than their appearance, in an age before motion-capture and even cut-scenes, really. "My mum knows who she is," ponders Pratchett. "The large-busted image of her stuck with lots of people. She became a caricature. When you think of her as big boobs, double pistols and being British, you don't think much about her character."

Pratchett didn't really see anything in Lara's character to empathise with back in the series' early days. "I remember, as a younger female gamer, that her visual put me off a little bit," says Pratchett. "I kind of lost interest in the games, because that put me off. I found other games after the first and second ones, because I didn't really like the way that she'd become... when people talk about the over-sexualisation of female characters, Lara was the first one that people really talk about. That might be unfair; she became the pin-up girl for over-sexualisation, but there were other ones out there who were much, much worse. She's really not too bad." >



IT'S A REAL COUNTERPOINT TO THE OLD INTERPRETATION OF LARA CROFT, AN INEXPLICABLY PROPORTIONED CHARACTER WHO HAILS FROM A TIME WHEN A VIDEOGAME PROTAGONIST WAS LITTLE MORE THAN THEIR APPEARANCE

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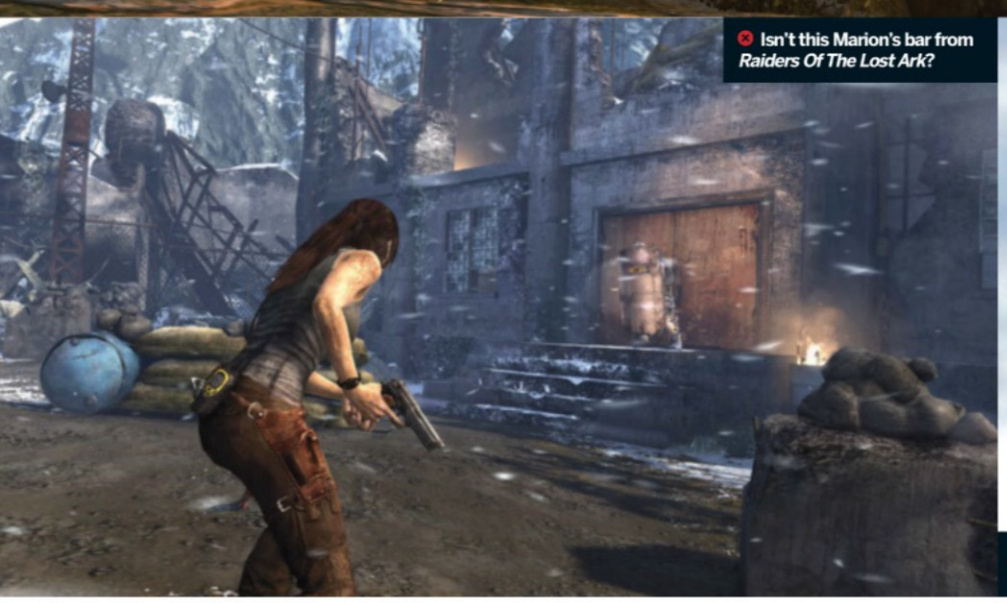
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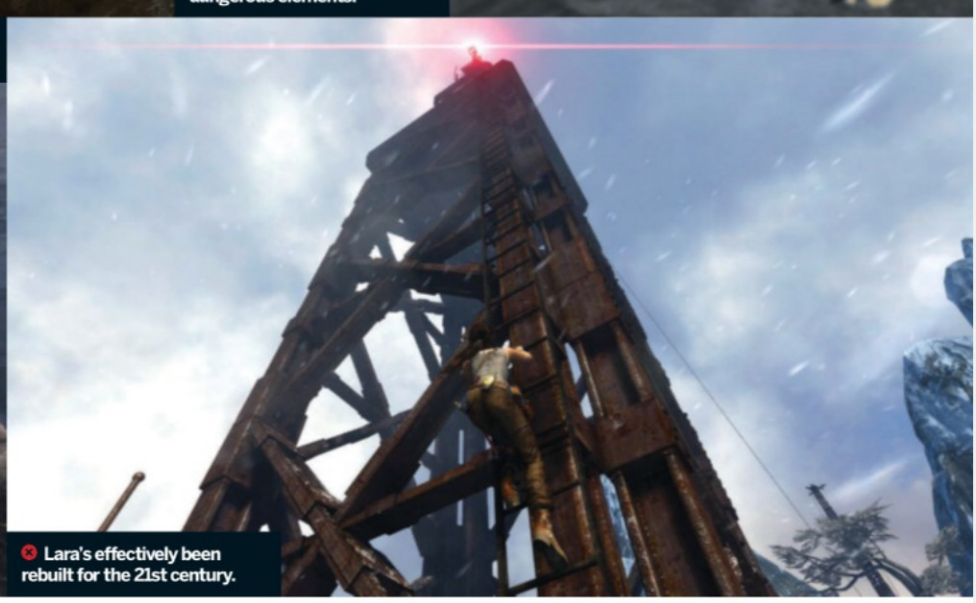
The island is fraught with dangerous elements.



Lara's survival vision is a lot like Detective Mode.



Isn't this Marion's bar from *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*?



Lara's effectively been rebuilt for the 21st century.

> Before her ship, ominously named 'Endurance', goes down, Lara's back story is that she's a university graduate seeking out an ancient, lost kingdom of a historical figure known as Queen Himiko. After washing up on the beach and facing an encounter in a cave, you're unleashed upon this new environment to survive – and that's when the game really reveals itself.

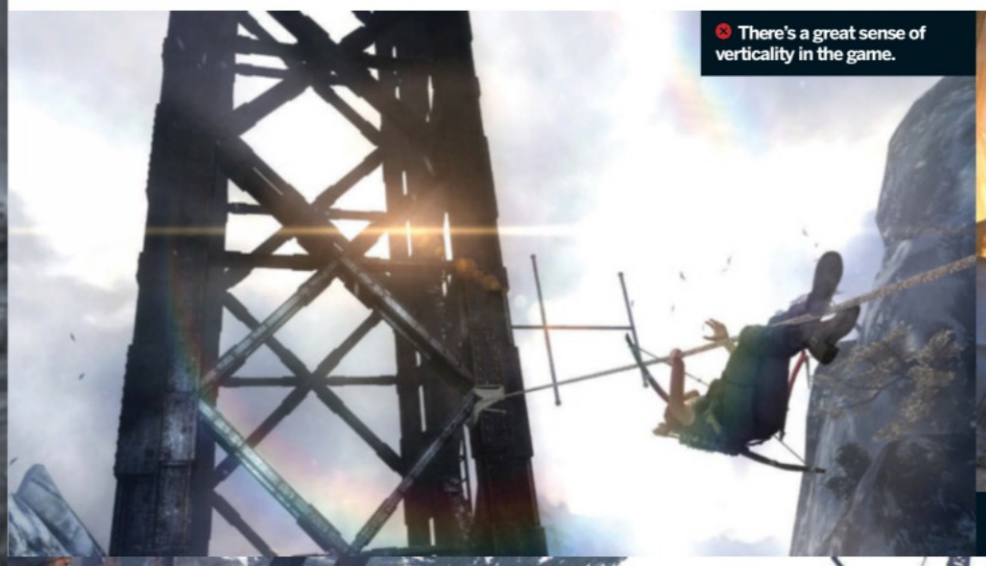
When Lara arrives on this island, she's already equipped with certain skills that lend themselves well to traditional gameplay mechanics. Pratchett herself went to a public school in the UK – that is, posh schools that arguably offer a social advantage to the rich – and so did Lara Croft, it turns out. At these public schools, students are actually taught how to use a bow and arrow, so Lara's already familiar with the weaponry when she washes up on the island.

That doesn't mean she's au fait with killing animals to survive, though – when Lara kills her first deer, she apologises to it. That's a huge part of understanding this new interpretation of Lara Croft, in dealing with the idea that she doesn't embrace the heart of darkness as readily as other videogame characters – she won't be a serial killer, and believability is key to Crystal Dynamics. "The way we play it is to make sure that her motivations are relatable," says creative director Noah Hughes. "Ultimately, there's a darkness that she won't ever cross. That was one of the big goals with this first two hours of the game; rather than go straight to the gameplay actions, to sell them as actions that are motivated by character in a way that is relatable."

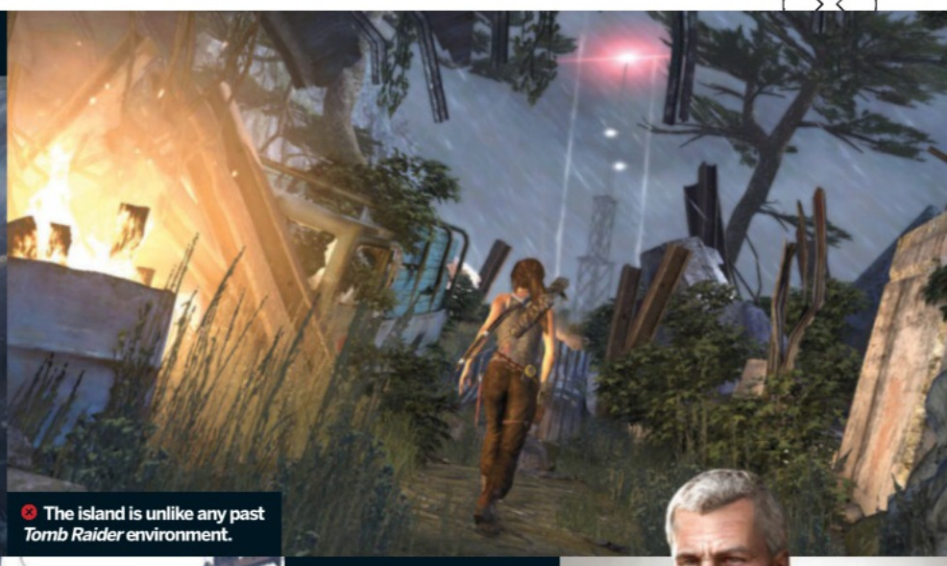
Lara's story isn't completely island-based, though – she will find diaries that recall life on the ship, gradually putting together an overall story that will hopefully tie certain things together about how she washed up on this island. The crew of Lara's ship and the scavengers aren't the first to colonise this place by a long way; we'll also see insight from WWII Japanese soldiers, the people of Queen Himiko and sailors from bygone eras that will inform our perception of it.

AFTER WASHING UP ON THE BEACH AND FACING AN ENCOUNTER IN A CAVE, YOU'RE UNLEASHED UPON THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT TO SURVIVE – AND THAT'S WHEN THE GAME REALLY REVEALS ITSELF

Structure-wise, the reference point Crystal Dynamics is using for the reboot is *Zelda* – previously it was teased that the game is 'open world', and to some extent it is, with players able to travel between different hubs and hunt to level up equipment. There's even a little bit of *Skyrim* in being able to fast-travel from a large map; but *Zelda* is a little more apt, here (or *Darksiders*, if you'd rather not acknowledge Nintendo in any way, shape or form), in the way that it's broken up into little hub levels, riddled with fun secrets.



There's a great sense of verticality in the game.



The island is unlike any past *Tomb Raider* environment.



For once, Lara's handguns aren't the weapons of choice.



Lara isn't alone on her island adventures, thankfully.

"Being an old-school gamer, things like *Zelda* were beautiful structures," Hughes says. "It brought you past things you couldn't do and then brought you back to them on the critical path. Being exposed to that, being incapable of overcoming an obstacle, and then being capable of it... Lara's growth is one of the most important things in this game, and that's a way to express it."

The world is depicted so you can either run through it or pick out the details – each weapon doubles up as a tool to assist in puzzles, and as such, you're given an incentive to return to earlier parts of the game later on. The map screen keeps track of your level completion, so there's a frequent reminder to go back if you want to totally beat the whole thing.

It's the progression that we find the most fascinating, however. Lara has three skill trees – Survivor, Hunter and Brawler – that work hand-in-hand with item gathering and her abilities. Each weapon has around ten upgrade slots. We note that the bow, quite strongly put forward by the game as Lara's new standard weapon (probably helps with marketing, since *The Hunger Games* and excellent superhero TV show *Arrow* are massive right now), is the most useful weapon to use in the game, and terrific fun for picking enemies off with. We're shown a later part of the game by Hughes, where Lara is heading towards a small town underneath a giant, ancient palace on the island. Gathering parts from crates, you can turn Lara's shoddy early bow into something a lot more refined, thus changing the combat experience and making her a more effective survival force.

Yet upgrading isn't limited to weapons – when it comes to Lara's combat abilities, the possibilities open up over time. What starts as a melee counter, for example, can be bumped up three times. It begins as a dodge, and at its maximum level, will transform into an insta-kill throat stab, reflecting a progression system that actually matches the evolving personality of its character.

We're impressed by how interactive the set pieces are, too – we see Lara escaping a collapsing tomb, sliding down slopes, *Mirror's Edge*-style, and falling from an airplane cockpit towards a forest, then opening a parachute at the last moment and drifting towards a castle in the distance. All the while, you get to play key parts of it, rather than just watching a cut-scene play out with no input from you whatsoever. It's impressive, and over time you begin to find this version of Lara engaging.

She's not alone on the island, either. There's a Sean Bean-esque northerner called Roth to lean on for help, who's elusive early on, but later acts as her mentor. Roth knew Lara's parents, and challenges her on the inevitable killing she performs to survive on the island.

At the end of the initial two hours, Lara can kill humans and animals openly. However, Pratchett found it a challenge to get the character to the point where that was a plausible setup. "We do go back to it, in that she speaks to Roth about it and he's definitely not happy about it, telling her 'that can't have been easy,'" she says. "And she responds 'it was scary how easy it was.' Speaking to that mindset, she certainly doesn't cry any more after that point, but with the journals, you can see that's she very aware that she can't think about it. If she thinks about it she'll start to feel too much and she'll be incapable of doing anything." >

WHY LARA NEEDED TO CHANGE

A Tomb Raider reboot was inevitable, really – here's why change to Lara's adventures was always on the cards...

A NON-STORY IN A STORY-LED GENRE

Uncharted changed the field for *Tomb Raider*, with a hero who became the thrust of an *Indiana Jones*-style adventure. Lara, on the other hand, was a posh person on an adventure – there was no emotional connection between that character, the player and the environment. Crystal Dynamics had to react to that contemporary change.



SERIES STAGNATION

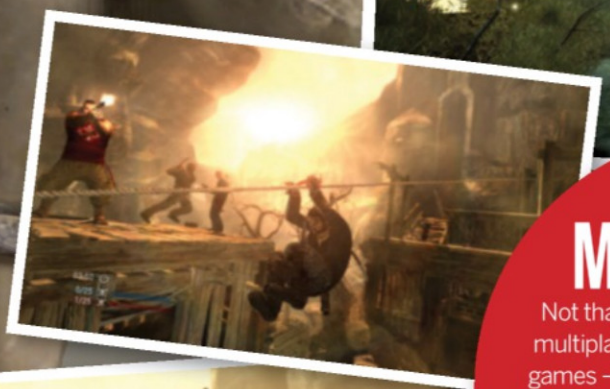
The mechanics of *Tomb Raider* just weren't as interesting as they used to be in *Underworld*, with outdated shooting mechanics that undermined the otherwise great work done with the platforming (particularly when it came to animation). It just didn't seem like *Tomb Raider* had evolved enough – the reboot is a complete rewrite of the series' design.

LARA CROFT, OUT OF THE TIMES

Still very much the Nineties Lucozade PSone icon, Lara comes from a world where the Spice Girls were at the top of the charts. And while Crystal Dynamics got her back on track with *Legend* to some degree, it was still the same Lara. She needed a 21st Century reimagining, which is what we see in this year's *Tomb Raider*.









PROGRESSION NEEDED

Every game has a progression-based system now, no matter how arbitrary – it just so happens that the new *Tomb Raider*'s levelling-up system is very good, adding a slight air of RPG style to the way the game plays out. *Tomb Raider: Underworld* nailed a lot of stuff, but this will give the franchise the edge in keeping players along until the finish line.

NO MULTIPLAYER

Not that we agree with the concept of multiplayer in traditionally single-player games – they can have a feeling of being bolted on, like *The Darkness* or *Dead Space 2* – but it's a bankable feature for publishers, and in the case of *Uncharted 3*, it actually proves to work. *Tomb Raider*'s getting its hands dirty with multiplayer for the first time, and it might pay off.





Having a mentor on the island is handy.

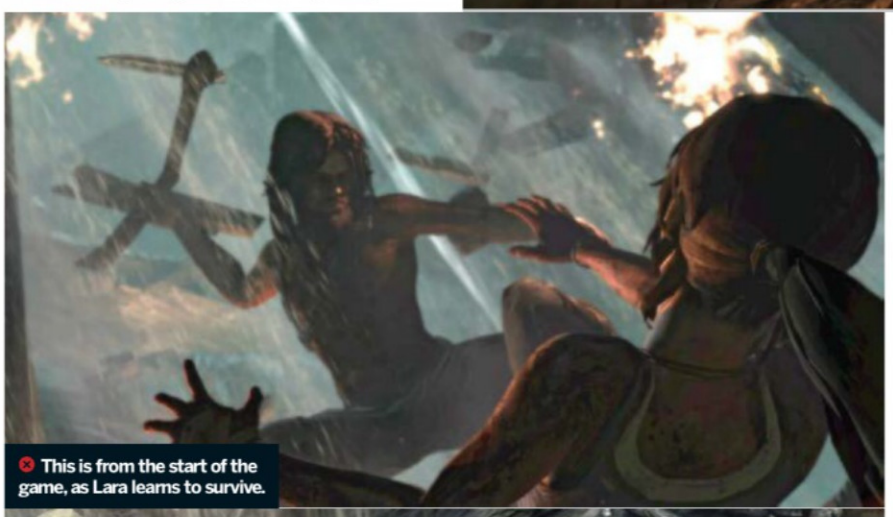
All is not as it seems on the island, as you'll see.



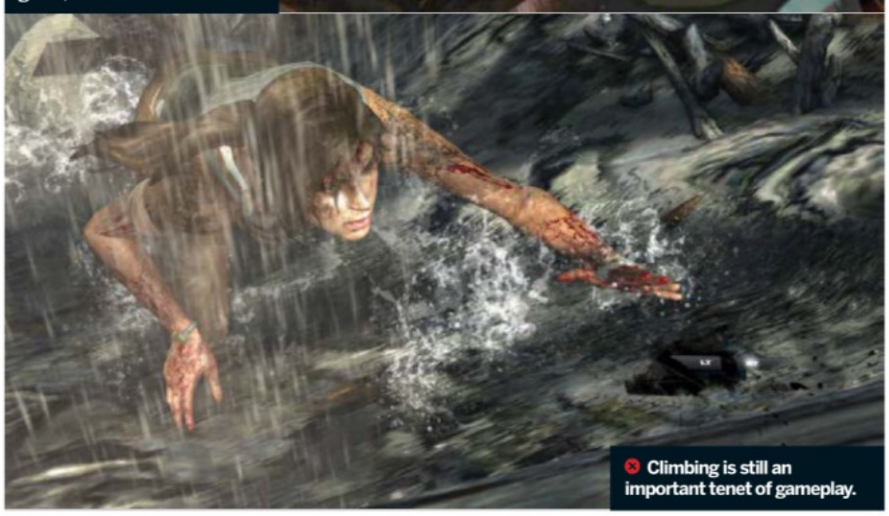
> Those initial two hours are the making of Lara, then, and from there her adventure unfurls in a fashion that both recalls traditional *Tomb Raider* ideas but with genuinely brilliant RPG-based ideas, as well as shades of survival horror in the atmosphere of the island.

It's really something to behold, but that's just one pillar of the game. There's the difficult addition of multiplayer, too, which Crystal Dynamics has treated as an equally viable part of the overall *Tomb Raider* experience. The question isn't whether multiplayer makes sense within this universe – it does, and we'll tell you why in a little bit – but rather if there's a place for another multiplayer game in the eyes of PlayStation users. At this point in the generation, we're not sure how enraptured people will be by the idea of multiplayer in a traditionally single-player-oriented title, but what's been produced here has a lot in common with the survival theme and smarter mechanics of the story.

The initial game will ship with five maps and four modes, while there will be downloadable content packs as well. Rather than overloading with content, Crystal Dynamics made the decision that a few very well-crafted maps were better on principle. "For us it's about quality not quantity," says Karl Stewart, global brand director for Crystal Dynamics. "It was 'let's build five maps that feel very structured, that take the single-player into the multiplayer world, and four modes that feel familiar that we can build on with our themes. Take Domination, Team Deathmatch or Capture The Flag and make them our own.'"



This is from the start of the game, as Lara learns to survive.



Climbing is still an important tenet of gameplay.

"As much as we liked ideas that were redundant to the single-player, they weren't rounding it out as much as I liked,' explains Hughes. "If you're in a super-tension place that's building up atmosphere, then you go to something lighter, it breaks that. Similarly, in *Guardian of Light*, we proved co-op puzzle-solving, but it didn't have the replayability and pick-up-and-play investment. If you want puzzle-solving and immersion, the single-player offers that; if you want to quickly jump in with your friends, the current multiplayer experience rounds up this disc with complimentary gameplay."

A team deathmatch mode with eight players doesn't sound initially exciting, but there's an incredible sense of verticality to the beach level we see, which taps into the nature of *Tomb Raider* in an incredibly sharp way – the fashion in which the maps are laid out makes it ideal for scoping out the environment. There are gun turrets to command, or ziplines to ride; none of it throws the game out of balance, though. Some of Lara's survival techniques cross over into the multiplayer, too, as players can put down traps, like lightning rods or snares, where you have to shoot your way out.

Better yet, a level we see that houses an old submarine has almost *Split/Second*-like set pieces to activate – you can electrify the environment by lowering two sides of a swing bridge, offering another way to get kills. The other mode we see, Cry For Help, has players raiding a Scavenger camp for randomly placed health stashes.

They're intriguing embellishments to a reboot we're incredibly excited about, but the single-player is still the star, for us. This is a daring reinvention of Lara Croft, to the point where it could readily have been a new IP for Square Enix – as a new interpretation of a classic PlayStation icon, however, we're really hopeful it will pay off.

Install

Where fact + opinion ÷ PlayStation = the truth

Need To Know



30 Million EU PS3s

Sony has hit the 30 million sales mark for the PS3 in Europe, confirming that the continent is now PlayStation's biggest territory, as Japan loses interest in home consoles and America veers more towards the Xbox these days. Apparently, though, we're a loyal audience. Huzzah!

grand theft auto V

It's Coming

It's going to be one of the biggest games of 2013 and one of the biggest ever released on a PlayStation console. Which is why we just can't get enough of talking about what will make Grand Theft Auto V so ruddy bloody great. Probably...

BIGGER: BETTER

We could use a 'size matters' joke here, but we're not that pathetic and lazy – instead let's just jump straight to the point: *GTAV* will be massive. How massive? Well we've already gone into detail about the locales you'll be exploring, the variety you'll see and how, while it is only one city, there's a hell of a lot of game behind it all. But Rockstar itself has put it another way, to give us all a bit of a better idea of what to expect: *Grand Theft Auto V* will be bigger than *Red Dead Redemption*, *GTA San Andreas* and *GTAIV*'s Liberty City put together. Do you know what that means? That means it's absolutely *huge*.

ALREADY AN AWARD WINNER

The VGAs may be a garish mix of the very worst of Americanism and the very worst attitudes behind gaming, but it does still show us lovely new footage and hand out a bunch of awards. In fact, the 2012 VGAs are the reason *Grand Theft Auto V* has won its first award – most likely of many – without the game even being out yet. Fortunately it's not as stupid as a man rushing out to teabag a developer on stage: it was the award for 'most anticipated game'. Usually we wouldn't make such brash assumptions, but after *IV* scooped over 40 awards it's hard not to believe number five will emulate – maybe even better – that success.

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Love *GTAV* or bored already? Tell us at facebook.com/PlayMagUK

VITA(L) STATISTICS

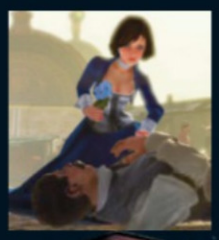
We covered it a while ago, and it's still awaiting some kind of official confirmation, but all signs in Rumourville are pointing to Rockstar working on Vita games. Does this mean we'll see *GTAV* on PS Vita? Honestly, we'd go with no – precedent points to something like we saw on PSP, with the likes of *Liberty City* and *Vice City Stories*, or *Chinatown Wars*. And you know what? That would be excellent, because all three of those games were absolutely fantastic. While *GTAV* might not be able to save the state of the games industry's retail wing, the series can give a massive new lease of life to a handheld that deserves far more success than it's currently enjoying.

GTA SAVES THE WORLD?

Since *Grand Theft Auto IV* came out back in 2008, the world has been through quite a terrible time, and gaming hasn't been immune to the effects of the global financial meltdown. In fact, we're still feeling these effects quite often, with retailers and developers shutting up shop (and studio) on an all-too regular basis. Gaming retail is in poor shape, and *Grand Theft Auto V* could end up being the last great hope of this generation: a game on which the entire future of whole businesses rest. You know, something like a slightly *massive* amount of pressure. And our favourite people, the analysts, have been unanimous in their opinions when asked: *GTAV* will not single-handedly save gaming retail.

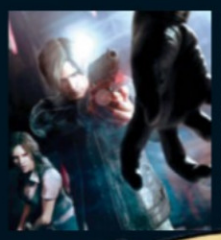
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IMPORTANT GAMING NEWS YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO MISS



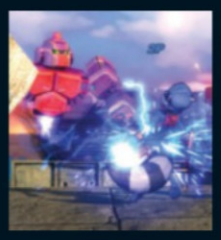
Infinite's Crazy Ending

The ending to *BioShock Infinite* is like "nothing you've actually experienced before," according to Ken Levine in an interview with Outside Xbox. Flying monkeys? Squirrels that can shoot laser beams? We only have to wait two months to find out, so fingers crossed on both of those fronts.



Resi 6 Sales Sadness

Apparently, divisive sequel *Resident Evil 6* will sell about a million below Capcom's expectations within its financial year. The Japanese publisher had originally planned on shifting 7 million copies of the game, but it now looks like only 6 million will be purchased by gamers.



All-Stars Sequel?

According to job listings on developer Superbot Entertainment's website, *PlayStation All-Stars* looks like it'll get a sequel on PS4, despite seemingly disappointing sales of the first themed beat-'em-up. A perfect opportunity to hoover up more characters from third-party publishers, then.

THE FUTURE

Yes – already. There's already talk of what's coming next from Rockstar North, even though *GTAV* isn't out yet. We're all for speculation and getting excited about the future – and don't get us wrong: speculating and getting excited about a *GTA* that brings all of the previous locales together under one roof on the PS4 is something we would normally be all over – but there's enough going for the game coming this generation to tide us over. Even if Rockstar North is hiring new staff to work on future projects already and has stated it would be for 'current and next-gen' projects and... oh, actually that is pretty exciting. But first *GTAV* – wow, we really are spoiled.

SPEAK UP

The voice cast of any Rockstar production is always something that pleases, whether it be Ray Liotta's excellent turn as Tommy Vercetti in *GTA Vice City*, Rob Wiethoff's ability to not just do an impression of Clint Eastwood in *Red Dead Redemption* or Aaron Staton's over-exuberant facial expressions on *L.A. Noire* – there's always been something great about them. So it's great that we're starting to get a slow drip-feed of clarification as to who has been in the sound-proof booths this time around, and while it's still only rumoured that Michael of the leading trio of characters is voiced by Ned Luke, strong rumours have made their way around the usual places that Franklin, also of the main threesome, is Shawn Fonteno of *The Wash* and *Three Strikes*.

EM PEE

We're already on the hype train for the main game, sure, but we've also dared to spread our enthusiasm into the realms of multiplayer this time around. While it was but a mere distraction in *Grand Theft Auto IV*, the combination of open-world multiplayer shenanigans and the more refined systems demonstrated in the likes of *Red Dead Redemption* and *Max Payne 3* (especially the crews mechanic) means *Grand Theft Auto V* will be home to some much-improved MP. But don't just take our word for it – listen to Mr Rockstar himself, Dan Houser, who told IGN: "I believe this one will be the best we've delivered yet, the most comprehensive package and the best set of things you can do and ways you can organise and try to make it compelling."

PLAY SAYS

THE PSN MONEY SINK

Have you thrown away money on the PlayStation Store without really thinking about it? Join the club. PSN is a dangerous place for impulse buyers like us...

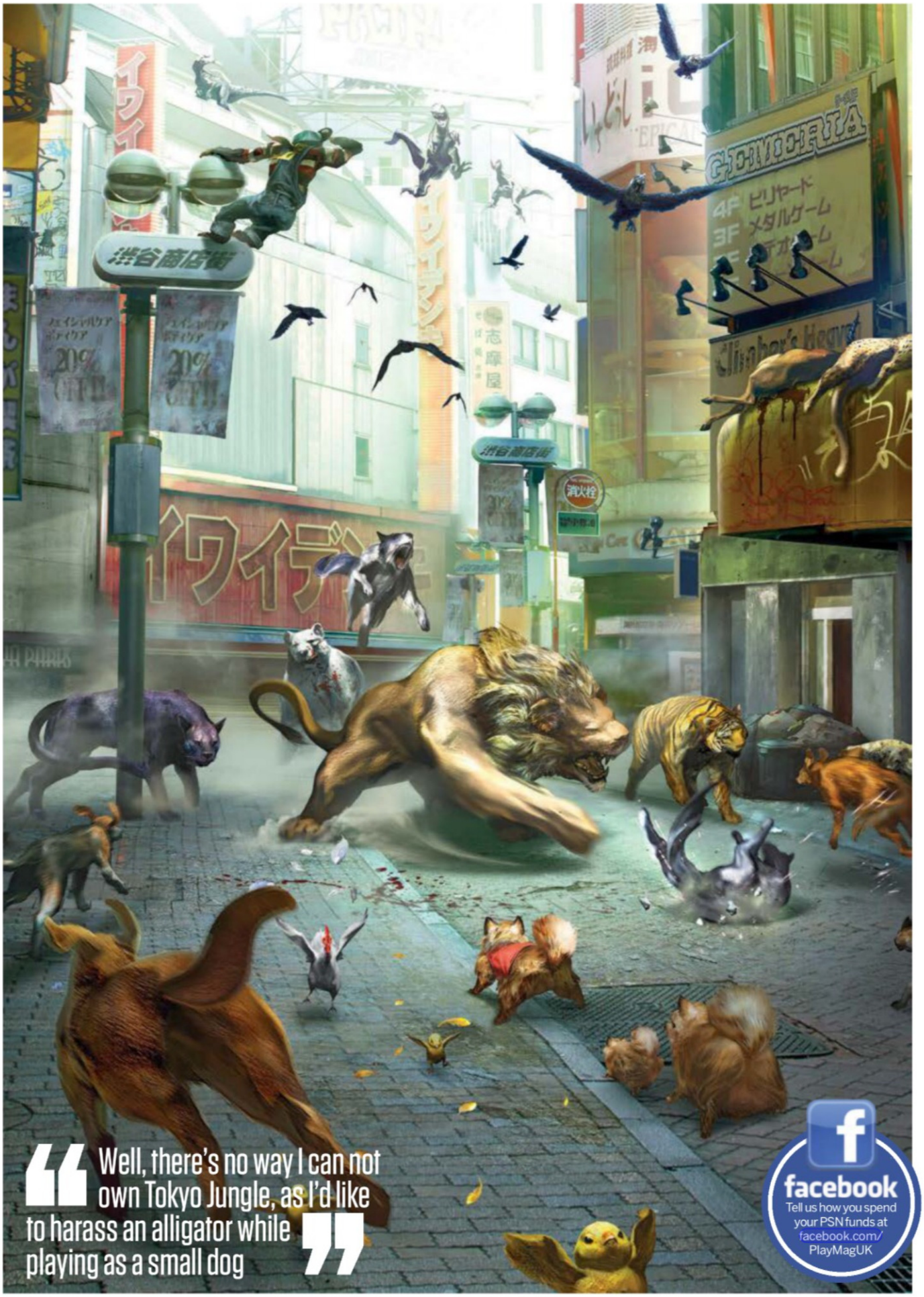


THERE'S A DIGITAL copy of *Resident Evil: Darkside Chronicles* on my XMB that I've played once. I paid over £10 for it. What was I thinking? At the time, no doubt excited by the prospect of *Resident Evil 6* arriving in my life at the end of 2012, I wanted to remind myself of the daft mythology that surrounds the series, but now I'm slightly livid that I threw money at it.

I think Sony's greatest accomplishment with the PSN during this generation is creating a storefront that encourages you to spend a lot of money. With such a fantastic range of PSN titles, HD re-releases and PSone classics to collect, as well as the option to attach a ridiculous-sized hard-drive (300GB in my case), it's a financially troubling service for hoarders like myself. My XMB is riddled with nonsense I bought after a hangover or payday (the mindset is usually the same) that I will never play – and I urge you to consider every last purchase to avoid being as broke as I am.

The issue is that £5 minimum payment on your PS Store wallet. When you need just £1 to be able to afford that piece of DLC you're after ("Ooh! *Lego Batman 2* DLC where you can play as Batman's son") or discounted PSN title ("Well, there's no way I can *not* own *Tokyo Jungle*, as I'd like to harass an alligator while playing as a small dog"), adding a fiver leaves you with pocket change that can easily be spent on a PSone game you really don't need. I've got a copy of *Front Mission 3* I'm never going to play, in amongst all the smarter purchases I've made, like the complete set of *Final Fantasy* titles on PSone or the *Crash Bandicoot* trilogy.

Anyway, it's dangerous if you've got access to a debit card. When the PSN went down and you had to re-enter details to make purchases, it warned me off buying stuff for a few months. It's actually not a bad idea to delete your card details off your machine every time you pay money for something, or, alternatively, just shop using PSN cards. That way you only pay for the important stuff on PS3. As good as the selection is, no one needs it all – no matter how tempting it might be to own the complete collection of *PixelJunk* games.



"Well, there's no way I can not own Tokyo Jungle, as I'd like to harass an alligator while playing as a small dog"

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Tell us how you spend your PSN funds at facebook.com/PlayMagUK

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ASSASSIN'S CREED III'S CONNOR KENWAY

We chat to Stacey Rebecca Palmer about dressing up as everyone's favourite American revolutionary, Connor Kenway from Assassin's Creed III...

Photos © All rights reserved by Stacey Rebecca Palmer. Photos by Simon Trussell



What is it about cosplay that you find so compelling as a hobby?
I work full time in an office and study mathematics at degree level, so it's really important to have that creative outlet for me. Cosplay allows me to experiment and escape from the real world. It's really liberating throwing on a costume and channelling a character. I'm a lot more confident in costume than I am in real life!

How long have you been cosplaying?
I've always been into making my own costumes for fancy dress parties and the like, but I've only really recently stepped into the cosplay world. I was doing a bit of alternative modelling here and there, when I realised I had all these fancy dress costumes that I could use. About six months ago, I tried to replicate J Scott Campbell's Amazing Spider-Man #601 cover as Mary Jane, which went viral and kicked it all off – I've not looked back since!

Of all the outfits you've created, which have posed the greatest challenge to you?
*Connor (*Assassin's Creed III*) was definitely the most adventurous costume I've made to date – the detailing on the coat and hood, working with unfamiliar materials and my first time making weapons. It took a* long *time but I'm such a huge fan of the series (have you seen my tattoo?) that I just kept going until I was happy with it.*

What's your criteria for choosing a great character to dress up as?
I have two rules of thumb when choosing a character to cosplay. The first is that I will only cosplay a character I am a fan of. I often have people suggesting characters that I'm not familiar with, or from games that I've never played – I don't cosplay those characters because it feels like a lie. It's very important for me to be honest about who I am; cosplay is quite a personal experience for me. Second is only do it if it's not been done before, or I think I can bring something fresh and exciting to the idea.

What outfits are you proudest of?
Connor, definitely! I have never spent so much time (and money) on a costume before, my absolute heart and soul went into it and it is so *much fun to wear. Though next year I plan to up my game even further!*

Do you think the UK has a great active cosplay culture?
I'm still really new to the scene, and being quite shy in person I haven't had the chance to get involved fully – although I have started cosplaying at conventions and the people I've met have been awesome. While we lack the numbers of cons that the US has, we certainly make up for it in enthusiasm!

Do you consider cosplaying to be an art form?
Of course! It's a real inexact art for me, I've had no training whatsoever so I just make it up as I go along and hope for the best. Experimenting and making mistakes is part of what makes it so much fun!

Check out Stacey's Facebook page at Facebook.com/staceyrebeccaaltmodel. You can see the full set at sexycosplaygirls.com.

NILIN FROM REMEMBER ME

The oddly named star of Capcom's Remember Me jumps into people's dreams to mess with their memories – and she has absolutely no association with Leonardo DiCaprio...

BLANK SLATE

Nilin's own memories are a blank, sadly – they've been taken away, for whatever reason, and a big part of the story in *Remember Me* will see her trying to figure out what previously happened. We imagine there'll be big revelations relating to Nilin's past, and hopefully we'll learn a little more about what she was doing before the events of the game.

MARTIAL ARTIST

Nilin is pretty athletic, and can handle herself in a fight, with access to a suite of different powers – the best of which appears to be a 'logic bomb', essentially a cross between a grenade and a mine that will send a shockwave out from its target, knocking enemies away. Meanwhile, Nilin is strong enough to take down foes with melee attacks, with combos you can create yourself using the game's 'Combo Lab'. Like *God Hand* (probably).

BAD VOICE ACTING

So, yeah – this is the only bit of *Remember Me* we're thus far not convinced by. We're not sure what's going on with Nilin's accent, falling somewhere between Yorkshire, London posh and Welsh, with lines delivered like something from a TV movie aired on Channel 5 during the day. The backlash to the voice acting was such that Dontnod ended up defending it in a recent interview. Fingers crossed the final product won't be embarrassing when it comes to storytelling.

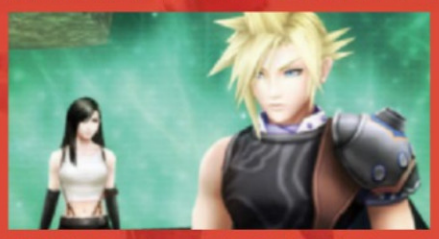
MEMORY HUNTRESS

BRAHM! Nilin can infiltrate people's memories and manipulate them to alter their actions in the present. On top of this, she can actually steal memories, too. Very *Inception*-y, then, even if Dontnod insists it came up with the idea before the release of Christopher Nolan's 2010 movie. The example we've seen so far had Nilin convincing a man he'd killed his wife, which led to the man killing himself – but these will form a cornerstone of the game's story.

twitter
Will you play *Remember Me*? Tell us at twitter.com/PlayMag_UK

AMNESIAC CHARACTERS

Gaming has a long history of characters who wake up without their memories, making it easier for players to identify with the blank slate nature of a protagonist – Nilin is far from being the first. Here are some of our favourite amnesiac heroes in PlayStation...



CLOUD STRIFE FINAL FANTASY VII
Convinced he's a former member of SOLDIER, an elite group of, erm, soldiers for the Shinra company, Cloud's memories are actually mixed up with that of Zack, his sort-of mentor, who was gunned down in a fairly nasty attack several weeks before the game begins. The gaps are eventually filled in, and the nasty truth about Cloud's background with Sephiroth is revealed.



KAT GRAVITY RUSH
Having fell from another kingdom, Kat wakes up with no idea of who she is. Luckily, a magical cat sorts her out with some powers, and she rewrites her life as something of an anti-gravity superhero with Hekseville (for some reason we always want to write that as Emile Heskeyville). Maybe amnesia isn't the worst thing in the world, then.



ETHAN MARS HEAVY RAIN
The big memory gaps for Ethan Mars is one of the plot holes in *Heavy Rain* – just why does he keep blacking out if he's not the Origami Killer? Anyway, doesn't matter, we suppose. Ethan's been through a lot. Maybe his emotional trauma caused his amnesia, although that does sound like the kind of storyline they'd use on *Desperate Housewives* or *Grey's Anatomy*.



RAIDEN MGS2: SONS OF LIBERTY
Raiden buries away his terrible memories of being a child soldier, it's revealed in *MGS2* – his hair wasn't always that conditioned, you know. Turns out he knew Solidus Snake, aka President George Sears, back from his child soldier days, too. It's probably a good time to remind you of *Metal Gear Solid*'s tendency to collapse off the rails and just do loveable daft story shit.

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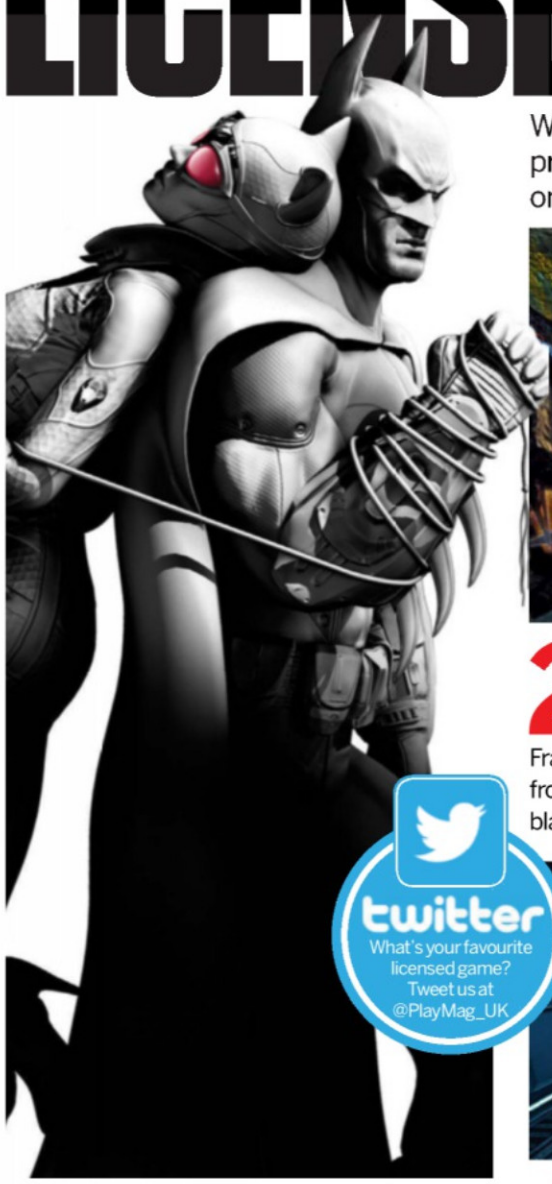
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TOP 5

LICENSED GAMES ON PS3

Whether based on movies, TV shows or comic books, we all expect game versions of our favourite properties to be a big pile of super-ass – but what about those occasions when super-ass just isn't on the menu? Here are five of the best examples...



twitter
What's your favourite licensed game? Tweet us at @PlayMag_UK

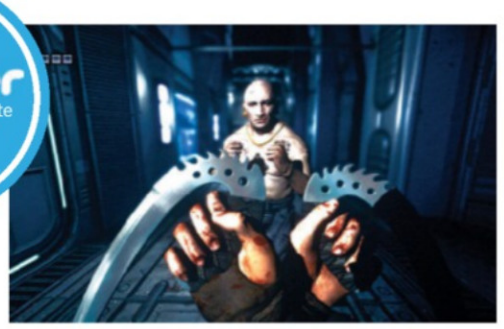
1 BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

You *are* Batman. *Arkham City*'s challenge rooms help make it one of the PS3's most compelling titles, encouraging mastery of its beautifully designed combat system. Can you throw ice as well as Batman? Have you learned to use Nightwing's electric sticks to the same standard as Dick Grayson himself? Turn it on again and give it a go.



2 THE DARKNESS

Environmentally, *The Darkness* is among the PS3's best games, with its narrow, grimy interpretation of New York's back streets. Frankly, Starbreeze's supernatural gangster FPS gave the Nineties comic from Top Cow way more credibility than it deserved. Plus, you can throw a black hole into the middle of a crowd of enemies. Aceballs.



4 CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

You are Vin Diesel! It's better than it sounds. Way more entertaining than either of the films, *Chronicles Of Riddick* is a refined stealth game that requires unconventional approaches to overcome situations – running away can be the best option, believe it or not, when all you have is a knife against about ten guards with machine guns.



3 LEGO THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Reviewed later in the issue, *Lego LOTR* is the best platformer yet from Traveler's Tales, mainly thanks to the way it uses audio content from the films, as well as some rather gorgeously crafted open world bits where you can harass the community in Hobbiton. Or, you know, ride a sheep. That's fun as well.



5 50 CENT: BLOOD ON THE SAND

We included this one because you can't help but admire how daft this 50 Cent game is, what with Fiddy's quest to recover a skull made from diamonds (is it going on his mantelpiece?). A relatively straightforward third-person shooter, elevated by an unexpectedly fun theme and good technical use of Unreal Engine 3.

AND FOUR YOU SHOULD AVOID

Seriously. Just look at 'em



THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

It should've been as good as *Spider-Man 2* on PS2, but the automatic swinging mechanic was miles from being in the same league.



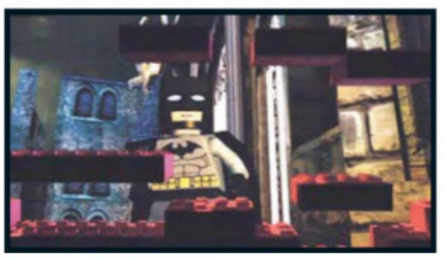
WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

Comic-book fans recently grumbled about classic graphic novel *Watchmen* getting prequels. Clearly they never played this fan-fic-style shite.



X-MEN: DESTINY

Poor old Silicon Knights, having not made anything good since the days of *Eternal Darkness* on the GameCube. This was awful.



LEGO BATMAN

We love the sequel, but without any interesting story content to latch onto, the original *Lego Batman* is disappointingly pants.

WHICH FRANCHISE COULD BOOST PS VITA SALES?



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A GTA spin-off, or a new Bioshock. **BRANDON HARLIM**

Here's some no-brainers.... Uncharted / Batman / Skyrim..... I love my Vita but all it's attracting at the mo is dust, dust and more dust.... **JAMIE GARDINER**

It won't be that OMG FREE CREDITZ THIS WORKS kinda shite, thats for sure. Maybe Final Fantasy? GTA couldn't hurt. **JOHN MURRAY**

Final Fantasy, God of War, Gran Turismo and Metal Gear Solid **MICHAEL RUSSELL**

TETRIS! Or maybe Borderlands... **PHIL ROBINSON**

Maybe this is where that hallowed Final Fantasy VII remake is necessary... **ADAM GILES**

GTA possibly Tomb Raider **STU VERNON**

YouTube
youtube.com/PlayMagUK

Vita is a portable console wii u is a next gen console that has better graphics than xbox and ps3 so it obviously would shit on vita **RONNIE FABRIANO**

I_ woud buy a ps vita just to play any metal gear online. **GIAGAMEGLIO**

I LOVE MY LBP VITAAAA **LAOREN DEVINE**

ninja gaiden sigma 2 plus and this one "plus", more ports pls like Onimusha, Okami and waiting for FFX **THELAPTOP14**

twitter
twitter.com/PlayMag_UK

Grand Theft Auto and Metal Gear would most likely bring money in. There's other things needed to help the Vita, though. **@VIDYAVICTOR**

Monster Hunter, then every idiotic journalist that says it's dead will then be praising it the next day. **@KITTLE11**

Monster Hunter in Japan! Final Fantasy or GTA in the west. **@HANKBIZZLE**

you've got to think soul sacrifice is the one that will help sales in Japan, over here? Gotta be GTA **@VEAZEYD**

Final Fantasy, Monster Hunter, A Decent FPS, Gravity Rush 2, to name a few ;) **@CRYSSLEONHART**

Final Fantasy **@DARYLSUDDEN**

Yeah, God of War for the Vita, sounds like a no brainer! **@SOLIVAGANT**

Resident Evil could help, 6 really wasn't as bad as everyone says and I trust Capcom to do a good job. **@_CHASETHELIGHT**

even stuff like Ratchet n Clank or Jak n Dax would go down well. But Vice City stories with the 2 sticks would bring em in **@SLAPTARZE**

In complete honesty, something major from Square Enix would do it!! **@LANGO454**

For mobile systems like 3ds/ vita Japan is most important... so exclusive Monster Hunters, Dragon Quest and a FF7 remake.... **@IRGEI**

YOUR SHOUT
Play readers have their say

Play Online

Want to share your thoughts? Shout into our digital ears at **facebook.com/PlayMagazineUK, youtube.com/PlayMagUK and @PlayMag_UK**, where we hang out when we're not doing work (i.e. all the ruddy time).

Re:Play

You are the controller! But only on these pages

Why enjoying PS3 games is always subjective, why we want Trophies on PS4 and a chance to win one of the worst games of last year – it's the **Play** letters pages, endorsed by Kaz Hirai (in a fictional comic we drew)!

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PSONE GAMES ON VITA SUCK!

Dear **Play**,

I have recently downloaded a couple of PSOne games for my Vita to try relive old favourites like *Alundra* and *Metal Gear Solid*, but what I have found has been rather disappointing.

First of all, the screen seems to shrink roughly to the size of a Game Boy and then the rear touch screen becomes really frustrating and such classics like *Metal Gear* have become almost unplayable in places. Is there any way to fix any of these issues? If not, why have Sony let the technology interfere with classic gameplay! I would hate to play such a brilliant and long game like *Final Fantasy IX* on such a small screen!

Rob Jackson



It depends what you mean by disappointing, Rob – you can change the size of the screen and where the controls are mapped by holding down on the Vita's front touchscreen, so the image will fit without any trouble. That should solve that problem for you. Otherwise, some games hold up better than others, but in our experience, the *Final Fantasy* titles and *Metal Gear Solid* hold up particularly well.

PLAY HATES HOLIDAYS?

Dear **Play**,

I must congratulate **Play**'s art department and sub editors on consistently producing a well designed magazine – it's eye candy for all the readers! However, during my two years as a loyal subscriber to the magazine I have never noticed any seasonally themed issues celebrating Halloween, Easter or even Christmas! Why is this so? I enjoy seeing festive-themed cover designs and leafing through pages having a sprinkle of cartoony snowflakes and laughing snowmen to cheer me up during the cold winter nights over Christmas! I must say, what a missed opportunity to add some flair to the pages and brighten up the magazine! Or is this just a case of 'Bah! Humbug!' by **Play**'s overworked staff?

Yours faithfully,

Adrian Fisher

It's nothing against Christmas, Adrian, or indeed any of the other major holidays. It's just that our art department – Andy Salter – deems it unwise to focus on a single holiday when we tend to be on sale for a month, which can run past such festive times and make the mag look out of date. But no, we love Xmas (or whatever holiday you celebrate)! Maybe someday.

THE BIG ISSUE

ASSASSIN'S CREED III IS A LET DOWN

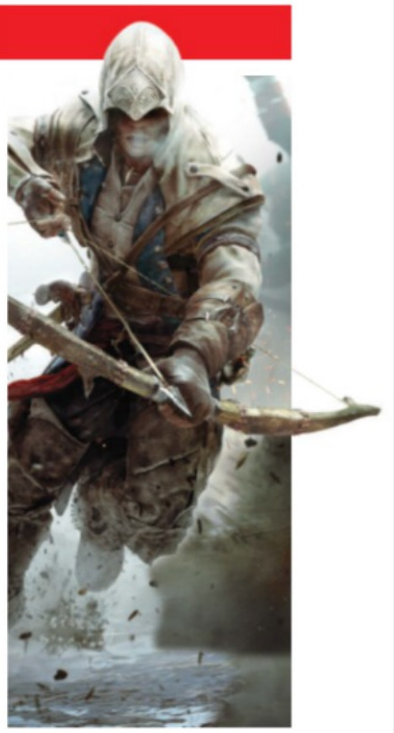
We've all been there. You have high expectations of something, your excitement builds to the point it outweighs the excitement of owning it and then it all comes crashing down when it turns out to be less than worth it. In a word, disappointment. And gaming is very guilty of this.

You guys recently reviewed *Assassin's Creed III* and you aren't the only ones who believe it didn't live up to the hype. It wasn't bad but it wasn't as good as we'd hoped/expected. But remember when it hadn't come out yet? When we believed it would topple all previous games in the series? Back when there were only positive previews, if a little apprehensive from time to time. That was good, wasn't it?

But at some point, it all went wrong. If we were to compare our thoughts back then to what we know now, we might realise what exactly changed after playing it. But it doesn't change the fact that we've been let down after having high hopes. And we say it won't happen again but it won't be long before another reboot/true sequel/original idea comes along and does it all over again. But these risks are all part of the fun of being a gamer, so is it worth it in the end? When a game is a disappointment, is it difficult to give it an unbiased review? Are there any particularly bad experiences you feel like sharing?

I'd love to hear from you guys and keep up the good mag!

Jack Mowat



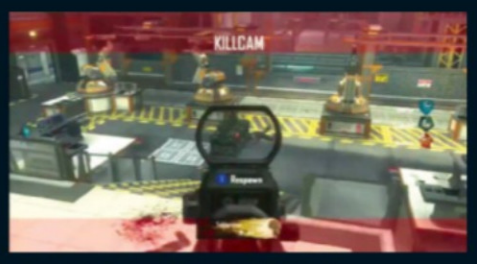
Maybe, Jack – there are a million different factors that can affect our views of something from preview to review. Often, we'll have different people seeing games at various stages, and since these processes are subjective, they could have split opinions on the same game. We try to be measured in our excitement for upcoming titles, maintaining a critical eye and calling products out for being poor wherever possible. Usually, however, publishers offer a very narrow slice of what a game is, naturally wanting to spotlight the best bits . That's why we have a review section, too. We will always be definitive with a game and can help you avoid disappointment – bias simply doesn't come into it. We're proudly on your side, always. When it comes to review disappointments, there are too many to name...

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RATCHET & CLANK: Q-FORCE
GAMEPLAY VIDEO



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS II
NO PERKS WALKTHROUGH



DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY
DEMO WALKTHROUGH



Write in, and win! If you're chosen as Star Letter, you win a game. This month, the prize is Sports Champions 2. Why? It was on our desk. It was either this or a stapler. We think this is better.

STAR LETTER

OVERRATED PS3 GAMES

Dear **Play**,
Is any game, PS3/Vita or otherwise, ever truly underrated or overrated? People's opinions and perceptions of what makes a game bad or good are usually direct reflections on the consensus of the gaming community. For instance, *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* may be one of the best, most polished games on the PS3 according to the mass PS3 community, but there are always some who may have a genuine reason to dislike it. I personally find it to be one of the best games on the PlayStation 3, alongside *Heavy Rain*. Yet there are gamers who will point fingers at *COD* games for being overhyped and overrated, but Treyarch and Infinity Ward have worked so very hard to produce a game catered to as many as possible. How is their dedication to their craft and making exponentially popular games overrated?

You don't have to like a game franchise for it to be praise worthy. I'm sure you all remember Bizarre Creations' *007 Blood Stone*? That was panned by critics, but the public have approved of it according to the Metacritic user score. I like to read reviews from a large variety of publications, so I get a good understanding of what I may be in for when making a purchasing decision. In the end, though, it's down to the gamer to decide what games they want to play. That opinion is neither underrated or overrated because we all have our own notions and perceptions of what is genuinely good and genuinely bad.
James Davie



Fair points, James – although we will say that it's a mistake to put any value in the Metacritic user score. While this sometimes reflects a valid alternate consensus, let's take *Mass Effect 3* as an example: fantastic game, but the user score, accumulated no doubt from people throwing a tantrum at the ending rather than evaluating the overall product, is at 4.5. Take everything on your own terms. We offer a score and a critical review that will help you understand if you like it or not; the rest is subjective, as you say. We reflect the interests of our readers as best we can – plus, *Blood Stone* is still a fun way to while away a Sunday afternoon. There are some games that fulfil certain functions, and just because we give them a score that hovers around the 60-70% mark, it doesn't mean that you should necessarily ignore them. There's this bizarre belief to some consumers that 70% is an average score for a videogame. Plenty of people reacted negatively to our 78% score to *Assassin's Creed III* online. But how is 22 points off a perfect score a bad thing? You have to take a variety of things into account when reading a review and picking up a game. Like you say, *Blood Stone* appeals to you, and when *Skyfall* rolled around in UK cinemas, it was still the best option for a James Bond game when we needed one.

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We take to our Facebook army made up of our nearest and dearest to ask...



Play
How do you feel about the ongoing lack of Skyrim DLC on PS3?
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Teri Otis Redding It's Microsoft there Slack and they have the rights and ownership of the DLC that's why there's none still

Michael Johnson Meh. Bethesda hates ps3 so it was expected I guess

Andrew Coote not just that, its also to do with the problems Bethesda have had converting the source code of the DLC from Microsoft PC/XBox360 to PS3 coding. They have failed with the 'Dawnguard' DLC to get it working on PS3, but 'Hearthfire' they say will be on PSN mid-late next year, half price as well, as a way of apologising to SkyRim PS3 gamers for the problems.

Zack Colam I'm very unhappy about it, I love Skyrim and would happily gobble up any dlc for the game but Bethesda's ongoing in ability is ruining what still is a great game, one of the best ever. So come on Bethesda, pull your finger out!

Arthur Scroggins It's well known that the new game engine just doesn't work that great on the PS3, and the DLC just plain breaks it, it has nothing to do with Microsoft and rights to the DLC. If you like the game that much just buy a second-hand 360 and enjoy a glitch free experience like I did. (500hrs gametime and rising)

Tommy Wood It's total balls! I actually had to get it on (shudders) the 360!!! I feel so cheap

John Murray Not arsed really. Game is huge as it is, and I'm not nearly finished.

Peter Martin I hope they release a ultimate edition so I can play all of the DLC at once

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FAMILY GUY
BACK TO THE MULTIVERSE VIDEO



BATTLEFIELD 3
DLC WALKTHROUGH FOOTAGE



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Are people turning against *Call Of Duty*? Sort of.

BLACK OPS II MULTIPLAYER IS RUBBISH

Dear **Play**,
Okay. I don't know if this justifies as a letter or more as a rant, but I'm just gonna say it: *Call Of Duty: Black Ops II* multiplayer... is rubbish. I, like so many people, like change, but the saying 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' doesn't come from nowhere...

Up till now the *COD* franchise has kept a sense of similarity within its games, its arcade style has been completely distinctive when compared to its rival *Battlefield*. I can quickly plug in and play *COD* while the girlfriend is in the bath, whereas *Battlefield* I had to plan my diary around (which isn't a bad thing). So, obviously, I was looking forward to playing *Black Ops II*, the first one was great, it found its feet as an independent game yet still held true to the style of all the *COD*s. Oh, how wrong I was. Yes, in some parts it looks like COD but to me it felt like an arcade version of *Battlefield*. The smoothness of *COD* has been replaced with a chunky game play style which plays more like *Battlefield* than COD ever did. Why do this?

Why not stick to your guns (no pun intended)? You didn't need to change the game style, *COD* never needed a 'Fix It'. We gamers are simple folk – just give us more guns and different maps and you will win our hearts over and over again. Look at *Borderlands 2*! All it was was a harder, better, faster, stronger version of the original. Brilliant.

When will developers learn? If it aint broke, don't fix it.
Dan Ball

Fair enough, Dan. After this many years *Call Of Duty* was bound to turn some people off. We quite liked some of the changes made to the formula with *Black Ops II*, and taking a risk in tweaking that formula is arguably the only way Treyarch can keep it fresh. After selling so many copies of entries in the series, we're grateful that it's at least trying to do something a bit different.

TROPHIES ON PLAYSTATION 4, PLEASE

Dear **Play**,
Is it just me who hopes Sony carry our trophies onto the PS4 when it's released? I don't mind if the system is developed further, but I would hate for my hours of gaming to just be gone and have to start over when the next gen comes out.
Joe Riddell

Joe, we're certain that Sony will carry trophies over to PS4, since it's the ideal way to maintain brand loyalty for the PS3's massive userbase. Also, the presence of a united trophy system between Vita and PS3 also hints at the value Sony has placed in them. We'd say that bodes well for their inclusion when the PS4 arrives.





WIN FAMILY GUY: BACK TO THE MULTIVERSE!

So yeah, we're running out of stuff to give away in the office, but this is your rare opportunity to win one of the worst games of the generation: Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse on PS3. To be in with a chance of winning this relatively shoddy prize, just answer this simple question:

COMPLETE THIS FAMILY GUY JOKE, ONE OF THE WORST IN THE WORLD EVER: THE BIRD IS THE...?

A) Bird B) Word C) I can't make next Thursday, mate, sorry

Pop your answer and address in an email to play@imagine-publishing.co.uk with the subject header 'Seth MacFarlane's filmography is inconsistent because he takes on way too many shows at once. Seriously man, give it a rest'. Also email that address if you need a list of terms and conditions.

twitter YOU ASK PLAY

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We ask you to ask us questions on Twitter, and then you do, and then we ignore you on Twitter and answer them here. It's the perfect system!

@ORLOV_FAMILY Why is it that when you send something by ship it's called cargo but when it's on a car it's called a shipment?
Sailors love irony.

@REDBULLCAT Do you think the PlayStation's aesthetic update means we'll see a UI like this on the PlayStation 4?
Maybe, but Sony tends to rethink its entire UI from system to system. Vita doesn't have the XMB, so it's probably unlikely.

@MATTBAKER96 What's the most annoying character in gaming?
We're still not over how much Tak annoyed us.

@UGLYTIPPY Will you give me free pots of cash?
Depends, what can you do for us? We need someone to wash our windows.

@REDBULLCAT What is the top title available for the PlayStation right now?
Journey, probably. Maybe *Flower*. Maybe *Okami HD*. Check the Playlist.

@SHAD0W1990 Why are you so awesome?
Fear gives us strength.

@BOMBERHERALD Why does my son want Weetabix instead of his tea?
Makes no sense; Weetabix has a boring taste.

@ROX598 Can I have a cookie?
Is that a euphemism?

@CARTERDJN15 Are there any exclusive downloadable gameplay for ps3 on gta 5
Not announced, no, and we'd say it's unlikely since Rockstar's been very democratic about DLC releases since all of that 360-exclusive *GTAIV* nonsense. Expect simultaneous releases.

@DANIELCAKE Could you draw me a picture of a cat?
We could, but we won't.

@HAPPYGEMINI Can you tell me next weeks lottery numbers?!!
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Because there's as much chance of getting those numbers as any other combination.

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Where's GTAV gameplay?

It looks all kinds of awesome, that we can't deny. But for all its impressive moments and gorgeous presentation, Rockstar's trailer is lacking one crucial thing for us: actual, hands-on gameplay. A couple of brief cuts look like they could, just about, possibly be cinematic shots of interactive moments, but for a game that claims to be radically shaking up its own formula, that's simply not enough.

We get it, we really do – Rockstar has mad love for Hollywood (both in terms of emulating it and sending it up) so this cinema trailer approach is exactly what we expected to see. But after hearing about exciting new elements like the switchable main characters, we wanted to see that in action.

Other recent trailers have managed to show off a blend of gameplay and cinematics while remaining impressive and effective. As much as we respect and appreciate what Rockstar has done with this slick trailer, it's absolutely nothing new. And that almost undermines the ambitious nature of the game itself. So let's see some actual, impressive gameplay in the next trailer, yeah? Ta.



PLAY

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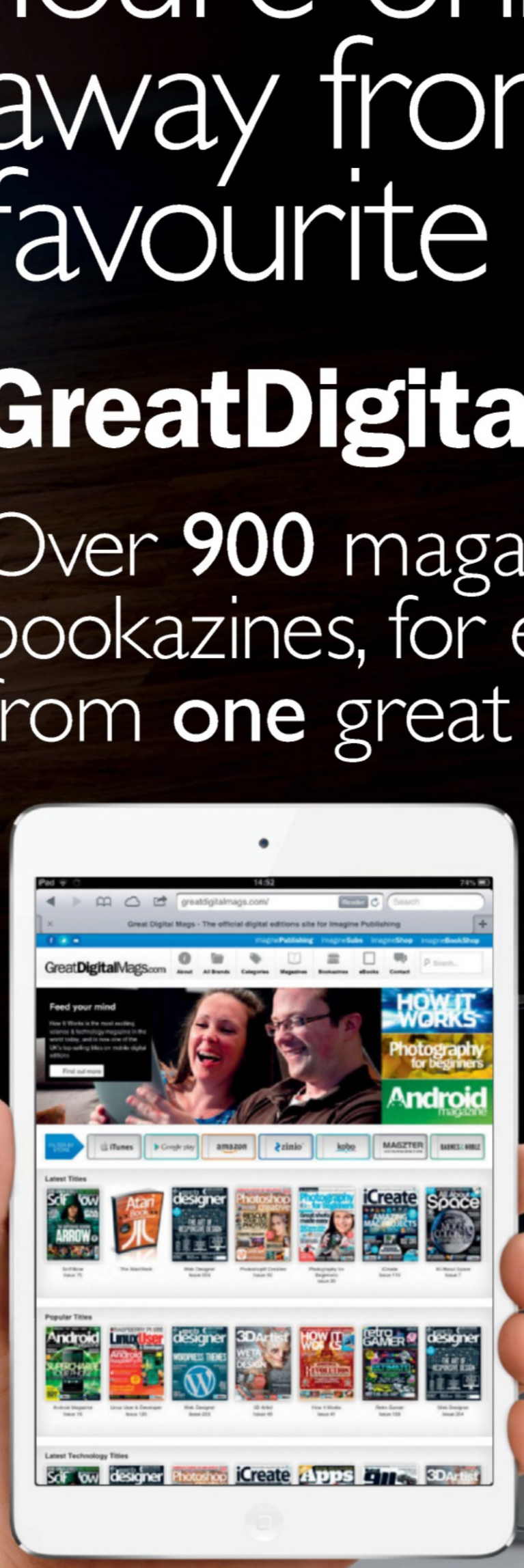
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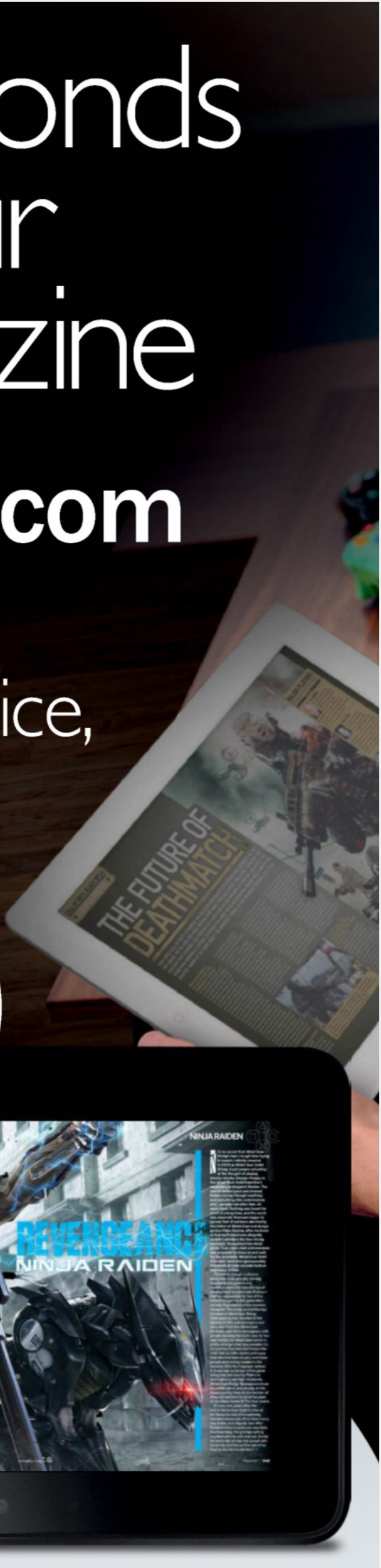
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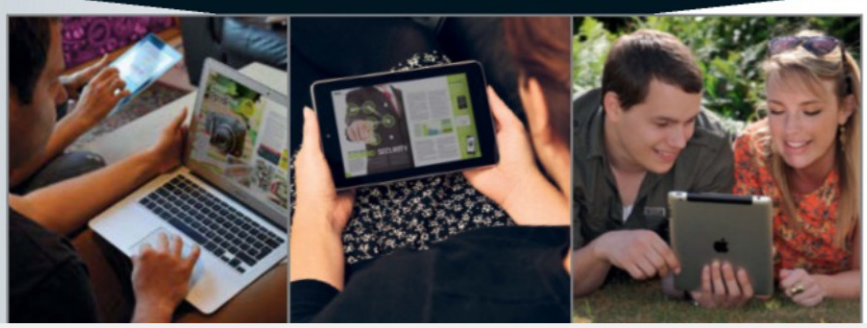
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It's deliberately like being attacked by vaginas.

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY

Aliens: Colonial Marines

A blast-fest that leaves a lot to the imagination



All the weapons from the films make an appearance.

PS3

"We ain't got time to sit around and play Sherlock" is a quote that, on the face of it, is a classic throwaway comment from an overzealous US army commander. Scratch the surface, however, and you realise it's the most accurate, insightful piece of commentary on *Aliens: Colonial Marines* and the entire *Aliens* video game franchise. You absolutely will not be sitting around "playing Sherlock" in *Colonial Marines*. Sherlock has nothing to offer in this universe, Sherlock would be no more than face-hugger fodder for the heavy-weapon-wielding Marines. That's because having to use Sherlock's abilities in *Colonial Marines* would assume a modicum of ingenuity and/or originality, which is a depleted resource on LV-426.

With that said, Gearbox makes no secret of the game's lack of innovation. When asked 'What makes this game different from other first-person shooters?' Producer Brian Burleson simply responded "Aliens". He was, of course, joking. He went on to explain the playable Xenos in multiplayer mode and the number of upgrades available to your Marine throughout the campaign. But regardless of the trimmings, 'Aliens' is the correct answer. But is there anything wrong with that? This game should unashamedly be a linear gory adventure on a distant planet, rife with puns, guns and alien shooting fun. Puns? Check. Guns? Check. Fun? Che… well, kind of.

The game is set some 17 weeks after the events of *Aliens* (the movie) unfolded. A secondary team of Marines has been sent out to find out what happened on LV-426 and pick up any survivors. The atmosphere processor has blown and there's still a lot of nuclear fallout. Weyland has come along with the Marines for the ride – or so it appears at first. The Marines are there on a purely explorative mission, but as we know, with Weyland money funding the mission, the true objectives are far more sinister.

The setting is truly within the *Aliens* franchise story arc and you wouldn't expect any less from a fully licensed, non-movie tie-in. Everything you love about the universe is there: the pulse rifles, the smart guns, the iconic motion tracker complete with sinister bleep sound and key LV-426 battlegrounds. They've even chucked in some weapon cameos such as Corporal Hicks's shotgun, which we're assured is devilishly powerful. Sega and Gearbox have clearly worked hard to provide the full and authentic *Aliens* experience. The only problem is that there's one key, *Aliens*-specific ingredient missing that's given the whole dish a weird, metallic taste – atmosphere.

Possibly the most important thing to get right when telling a classic *Aliens* franchise fable is to craft that feeling of uncertainty and loneliness, being in a constant state of mental isolation while fighting back a rapidly rising sense of impending, chest-busting doom. The majority of the films have accomplished this in some way, if not in its entirety – the game, however, feels like it hasn't quite worked out the formula yet.

In the brief campaign mission we played, we had crash-landed somewhere on the planet and needed to get inside to radio for help. This is the first time the Marines encounter the Xenos. The familiar slow introduction of a hostile creature watching you becomes apparent with lights flickering, moments of 'What was that!?' and suspicious green acid melting through the floor. Naturally, all of which make you think 'let's see what's down this >

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THE HUNT BEGINS

We'd be massively surprised if this turns out worse than *AVP*.

PREVIEW

THE INSIDE TRACK

We chinwag with Brian Thomas, director of central cinematics at Gearbox

Give us the lowdown on *Colonial Marines* and why you're revisiting the franchise...
Aliens: Colonial Marines takes places 17 weeks after the events of *Aliens* and just before the events of the third movie. Essentially the new Marines are dealing with the repercussions of the second movie, such as the atmospheric processor blowing and the impact of the nuclear fallout. Also, there's the sinister presence of Weyland and what his original intentions for exploring LV-426 are in the first place.

How does the game tie in with the film? Can we expect cameos from franchise veterans in the later stages of the game?
There are lots of nods to fans of the franchise in the game. For example, Bishop the android will make an appearance, voiced by Lance Henrikson. Lance was a big help during development – he provided lots of his funny stories from the set that we simply weren't privy to.

Did any of Lance's stories feed into the game?
We can't say, but he's a character, a phenomenal actor and great to work with. He hasn't missed a beat; he has the same intonations and cadence he did from the films – it's amazing to see how he's internalised the character.

So he hasn't gone crazy and believes he's actually an android?
No, hopefully not. He actually seems quite down to earth. If he ever needs a Halloween costume though, he's got one built in.

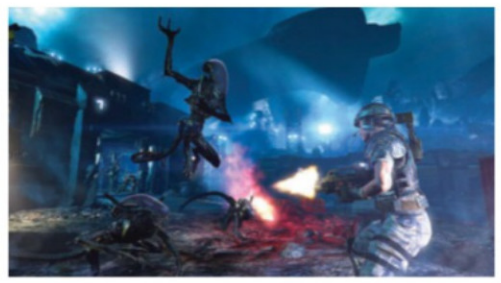
What about DLC? Is there anything we can look forward to?
No announcements yet; any announcements will be in the future.

Anything for Vita?
There are no Vita plans; that's business between Sega and Fox. You never know, though. If there's interest then maybe.

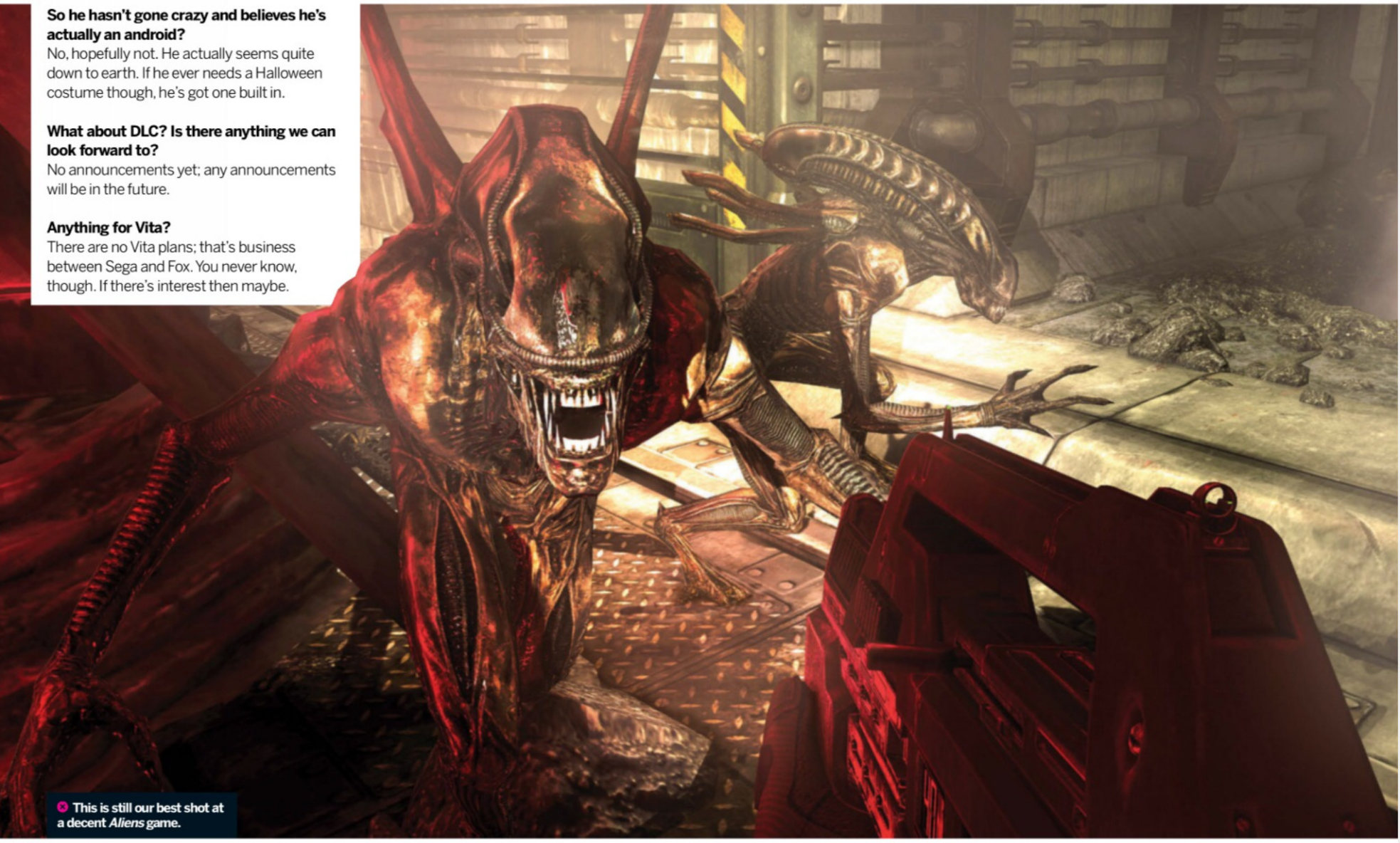


They move like the aliens in the movies, which is a bit scary.









This is still our best shot at a decent *Aliens* game.



Expect to see this sort of nasty thing a lot in *Colonial Marines*.

> dark corridor'. Unfortunately, when you do have to go down a dark corridor, it's all too obvious when you're about to come into contact with a Xeno. We predicted it to the second. Our prediction was so sharp you could set your watch to it. It was so on point, our editor now does the voice for the talking clock when you dial 123... but we digress. This is probably the first time we've played an *Aliens* game and not jumped at the sight of a Xeno, which is a big part of the experience. Without it, you've got a first-person shooter... with aliens.

The mission objective was to put up motion trackers around a small area within this abandoned complex, which we did, like a boss. Once we had the motion trackers up we had to make it to another area, for some reason. However, somewhere in between not knowing why we had to get there, and, erm, getting there, we were suddenly overrun by Xenos – lots and lots of Xenos. We picked up a automatic gun turret, deployed it near a weapons cache and let it tear up a few of 'em. We didn't sit back though – no sir, we got stuck in and wiped a load out. It didn't feel as though we'd accomplished much after the battle, however. The lack of surprise and the ease with which we dispatched the Xenos didn't feel like we'd just fought for our lives. Herein lies the biggest problem: the Xenos simply aren't terrifying. They're easily killed and you can bat them away with the butt of your gun. Although we do recognise that this is a useful gameplay feature, it isn't in the spirit of the *Aliens* universe and it erodes some of the fear. We're not purists, but fear is a major selling point of this franchise, and without it you've got diddly.

There are, however, some plus points that fans of the franchise will appreciate. After clearing the room, we picked up a Smart Gun and proceeded down a darkened alley. This provided the perfect scene to utilise the weapon – a big open corridor where Xenos can come at you from above, below, or directly. The Smart Gun is an excellent piece of equipment. It does most of the work and you simply have to aim it near the Xeno and fire. The HUD around the smart gun fills the entire screen, which creates an immersive feeling that's lacking in other areas of the game. Also, unlike other *Aliens* games, the motion tracker is a separate device that isn't fixed to your gun, which is a nice authentic touch.

There are a few of these nice touches throughout, which show that authenticity was important to the developers, such as the "Game Over Man!" dialogue throughout. Similarly, the artificial intelligence of the Xenos, despite being wusses, is really quite impressive. They come at you from all angles; above, below and direct. If you replay the same mission the Xenos won't come at you the same way twice, which is refreshing. In these aspects, Gearbox nailed it.

The action gets a little bit more frantic in some of the multiplayer modes on offer. There's your standard Team Deathmatch, where you can choose between Xeno or Marine and slaughter each other. Then there's Escape mode where a group of Marines have to get from point A to point B and survive the Xeno onslaught – again, you can play as either the Marines trying to survive, or as the Xenos trying to stop them. Extinction (a Domination-like mode) sees the Marines attempting to set off charges deep in Xeno territory, and naturally the aliens must stop them. Finally, there's Survival mode, which is self-explanatory – simply survive the alien onslaught and earn your stripes.

The standout pick of the flock, however, was Escape, it's a genuinely inventive team co-operative mode that requires actual team co-operation. Lone-wolf, white-Power-Ranger tactics don't apply here as our team quickly found out when we were clinically picked apart one by one. There wasn't time to mull over our failed 'strategy', though, as we were hoisted into the Xeno driver seat and told to stop the Marines from making their escape.

Controlling the Xeno takes some getting used to – certainly more than the five minutes that were allotted to us. At first it seems as though the Marines have an unfair advantage given that they've got weapons, but once you get to grips with the full Xeno arsenal they can be quite deadly. Pouncing from roofs and executing stealth fatalities are both satisfying, but they do require some mastering. You'll be able to build on your hard work online by using earned XP to customise your Marine with new skins, guns and loadouts. For the aliens there's a separate unlock tree where you can unlock new attacks, abilities and traits.

The multiplayer element of this game adds a level of excitement that's missing from the campaign mission, which, at the very least, should be a high-octane horror-fest that takes you on an emotional rollercoaster, leaving you dishevelled, malnourished and suffering from PTSD. Every second should feel like a struggle. Unfortunately, every second just seems a bit, well, generic.

There is time for improvement, however. The game isn't released until February and Brian Thomas, director of central cinematics at Gearbox, was fairly sheepish about upcoming downloadable content, so watch this space. See what we did there? Never mind...

Aliens: Colonial Marines is being developed by Gearbox and published by Sega. For more information go to **www.gearboxsoftware.com/games/aliens-colonial-marines**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

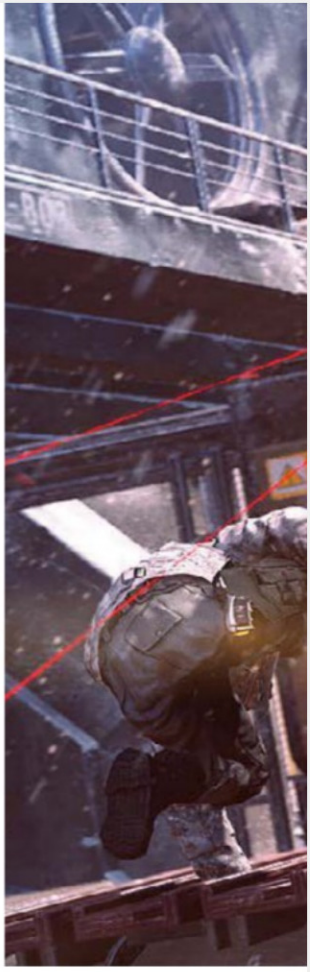
- Fans of the movies will enjoy cameos from Corporal Hicks's shotgun and Bishop the android
- The multiplayer mode 'Escape' is a truly harrowing experience
- The dialogue is an orgy of classic Eighties action movie puns
- XP upgrades can be collected in both multiplayer and the campaign

READ ME

Development of *Prometheus* and *Colonial Marines* happening around the same time is purely a coincidence, although Ridley Scott did give the game his seal of approval.



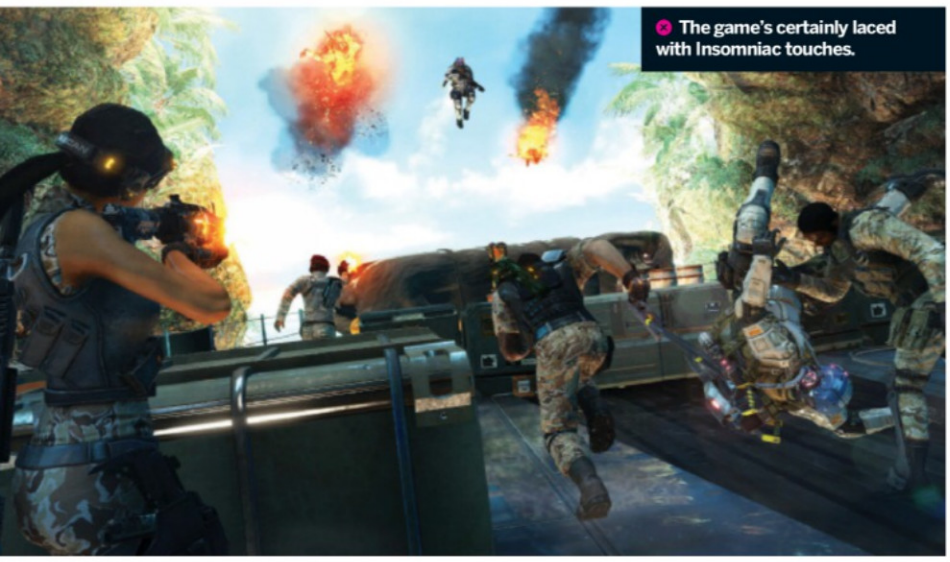
Fuse risks being lost in the wave of other shooters.



RELEASE DATE: MARCH

Fuse

The future is a bit bleak, and an awful lot like Vanquish



The game's certainly laced with Insomniac touches.





PS3

"We like to think of this as a cross between *Mission Impossible* and *Resistance*," Ted Price, CEO of Insomniac, exclaimed. He's right, *Fuse* does borrow *Mission Impossible*'s clandestine globetrotting adventure qualities just as much as it borrows *Resistance*'s otherworldly technology. What he didn't mention though is that those two qualities are two parts of a larger jigsaw, a jigsaw that resembles Sega's 2010 third-person futuristic shooter, *Vanquish*. Since *Vanquish* came out, the market has been aching for another cheesy, unabashed *Demolition Man*-inspired shooter to whisk us away to a future not so pretty – it's a formula that is surprisingly difficult to get right.

The similarities are undeniable. Ludicrous futuristic weaponry, fast-paced action, wave after wave of faceless robotic enemies (albeit with excellent tactical nous) and big clunking mini-bosses scattered throughout that need a shedload of hot lead and a little bit of teamwork. The storyline, too, is a little bit *The Expendables* meets *Contact*. Following the discovery of the alien substance called Fuse in the early Fifties, the US government began experimenting on it to seek out its capabilities. As technology improved, so did the experiments. Finally, they discovered that when Fuse is combined with another natural resource it creates new, volatile substances. A paramilitary group called Raven discover this, raid the US facility and take the Fuse for their own endeavors.

Fuse goes that extra step and builds where *Vanquish* left off, with multiplayer. *Fuse* has a four-player, drop-in drop-out co-op campaign, which is ambitious but so damn refreshing. Playing *Vanquish* was like drinking adrenaline through a beer hat with two bottles either side of your face – an experience that almost certainly should be shared with a friend. *Fuse* plugs that hole, caresses that need and satisfies that itch. Overstrike 9, the misfit team of operatives chosen to retrieve the Fuse, make up the four playable characters in the game, all of whom have Fuse-related special abilities and all of whom are playable either locally with friends or online with funny-named strangers.

The full range of abilities are as inventive as they are necessary. Dalton Brooks uses an energy shield that, when deployed, can protect himself and others; Naya Deveraux has a cloak device; Izzy Sinclair is equipped with a shatter gun that can crystalise enemies, and she has special healing grenades that when thrown heal nearby teammates. Then, finally, you've got Jason Kimble, who uses an electric crossbow. From playing the game it's clear you'll need to work with others and utilise the full complement of abilities to progress. During a particularly difficult campaign mission we played, we often

SPILLING THE BEANS

Brian Allgeier, creative director

TELL US ABOUT FUSE...

Fuse is an action-packed co-op game where you're playing as one of a team of operatives who are using Fuse-powered weaponry. The whole game centers around Fuse, which is an alien substance that, when mixed with natural material, becomes very volatile. We got our inspiration was from movies like *Mission Impossible*, which have that team based espionage element, but also the weapons of *District 9*.

ENOUGH SAID. SO TELL US ABOUT THE MULTIPLAYER MODES...

Sure, Echelon is a wave and round-based game. And every six rounds there's always going to be a mini-boss or a high-value target. Then in the last round there's a final boss who's the prime threat. There's also four other multiplayer modes. Critical Drop, where you drop supplies down to teammates for them to re-equip. There's also Countdown, where you're transporting Fuse between point A and point B, where you really have to use teamwork to protect the guy holding it. The package also emits Fuse energy which powers up all of your weapons. Then there's Hot Zone where you have to protect a Fuse cell in one location as lots of enemies come in. And, finally, Carnage, where loads of enemies come at you and you have to survive the wave.

CAN YOU GIVE US SOME EXAMPLES BOSSES IN ECHELON?

For prime threat, you'll get a boss like the enforcer – a big powerful robot. He launches motor attacks, and he will also use a lasso attack to draw you in to melee you.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- An impressive – although potentially headache-inducing – four-player online/local campaign
- If you're quick you can switch between players mid-battle and take advantage of their position
- You'll start a mini competition with yourself to see how many waves you can survive in Echelon
- 7-foot-tall men in a full armour and carrying a cannon-sized mini-gun are surprisingly agile

www.imagineshop.co.uk

found ourselves getting killed because of a lack of teamwork. We were tasked with taking out a mid-level mini-boss, or 'Heavy' as they're called in *Fuse*, and it required Dalton to draw the Heavy's fire, protecting himself with his shield. Izzy's healing grenades kept us healthy as we launched our attack, and Kimble's crossbow targeted the Heavy's weak spot on his back.

If it's too awkward to organise or you don't fancy playing with random people online, you don't have to play with four of your friends. You can just play single-player using bots as your teammates. If you do, you'll be able to switch between different players in-game and experience all of their abilities. We feel this isn't in the spirit of the game, though. Each character is unique and it makes sense to play with another human who will bring a touch of human error to that character's qualities.

The reality, however, is that organising four people to play through an entire campaign together over a period of time will be difficult. It's unlikely you'll finish the game with the same four people you started it with. When players join a game, they'll be playing from the host's last save point. They will be able to save progress and any experience points they pick up, but once they leave and they join another game they'll be starting from that host's save point. It could become a very disjointed experience if you're not organised.

READ ME

A team of highly skilled misfits put their oddities aside to save the world from a devious paramilitary group hell bent on world domination. No, this isn't Mighty Ducks 4.

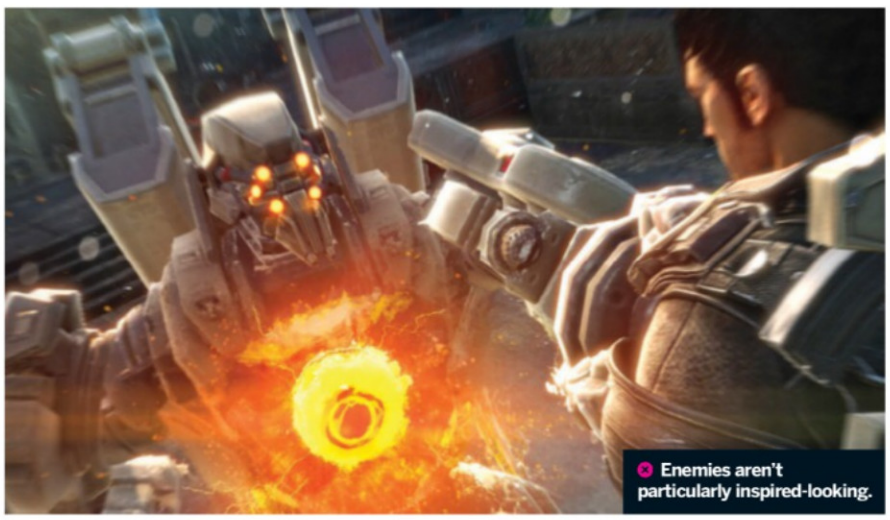
Who you play with is less significant in the team-based multiplayer modes. There isn't any team deathmatch or player vs player competition in multiplayer (possibly because balancing the abilities would be so difficult) – instead there are five types of survival games, including: Echelon, a wave based round game with mini bosses every six rounds; Critical Drop, where you have to resupply teammates by dropping supplies down to them as they fight off enemies: Countdown, which sees you protecting a container of Fuse that's being transported by one of your teammates; and Hot Zone, where you must protect a stationary container of Fuse from an enemy onslaught.

Playing online and in the campaign you'll be picking up Fuse points and Fuse credits (XP), which you can use to upgrade your loadouts and special abilities. Each of the characters has a second tier of ability. For example, Dolt can upgrade his shield so it can be dropped anywhere on the battlefield, while Naya's cloaking skill can be upgraded to invisibility.

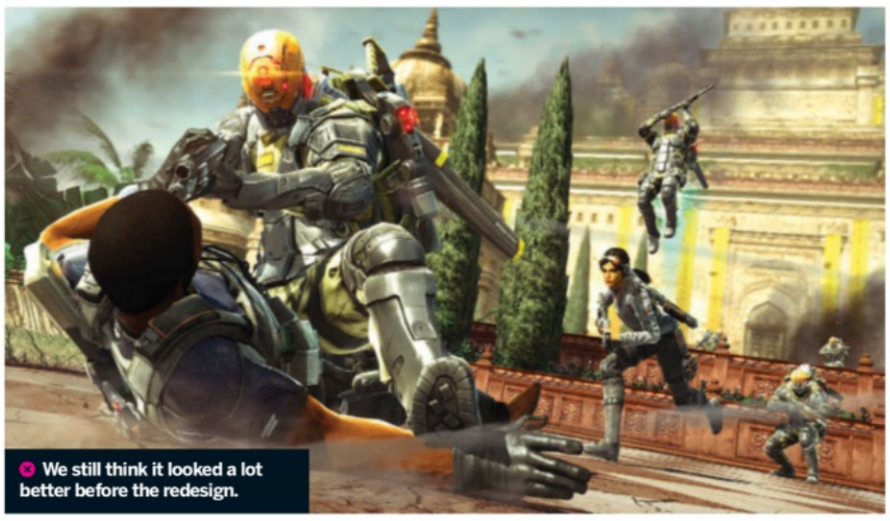
Co-operation in a shooter is often an add-on to the main single-player and rarely are the characters fleshed out, but in *Fuse*'s case it's a selling point. The strong individual performances give the game replayability, as you can experience the game with each character. The high-paced futuristic shooting isn't a new concept, but you'll be pleased Insomniac navigated this tricky formula so well. Fuse has bought something new to the table by breathing new life into an often overdone genre.

Fuse is being developed by Insomniac Studios. For more information go to **www.insomniacgames.com/games/Fuse**

This is Insomniac's first new IP in six years, since *Resistance*.



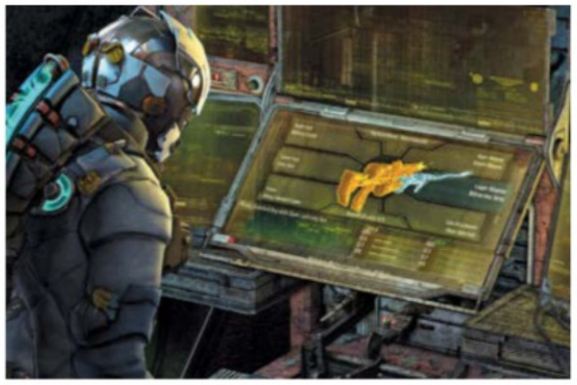
Enemies aren't particularly inspired-looking.



We still think it looked a lot better before the redesign.







THE UNFORGIVING ICE PLANET OF DEAD SPACE 3

Necromorphs aren't stupid; they know when to wrap up warm

THE HARSH TERRAIN of Tau Volantis makes taking out Necromorphs, and other locals hell bent eating you, a testing experience. Thankfully, upgraded weaponry is on your side.





It's still *Dead Space* – we still care.



Freeing yourself from a Necromorph death grip requires some serious button bashing.

ICE TO SEE YOU

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY

Dead Space 3

Terrorise your nerves with the third installment in the Dead Space series

PS3

Dead Space has been steadily going down the route of action and away from horror over the course of series; the focus on social gaming with co-op isn't in the spirit of wandering down dark halls alone. *Resident Evil* has evolved, for better or for worse, and so has *Dead Space*. So is this just natural progression of survival-horror games or is there more money to be made in action? The cynic in us wants to scream money, but the skill with which the *Dead Space* series navigates both survival horror and action-laced third-person shooting makes you think that the series has simply grown up and is offering a richer gaming experience to its players.

Dead Space 3's currency is atmosphere. It lives it, it breathes it, and it bathes in it. Just like any survival-horror title, the lack of gunplay must be accommodated for, with tension being the replacement. *Dead Space 3* follows this formula well but with more class. Other survival horror games like *F.E.A.R.* and *Resident Evil* rely on the big shock factor – a face appearing out of nowhere on your screen or gory knife battles with hideous mutated abominations. *Dead Space 3* lets the player create their own fear and tension by placing them on a distant, blizzard-engulfed planet with few resources and some basic early objectives. You simply never know what's around the corner and it's not clear how exactly you'll survive, since weapons and health aren't just scattered around for you to pick up at your leisure.

As with other *Dead Space* games, everything – walking, opening doors and picking up items – is done at a slow pace, which is, quite frankly, excruciating. There is a purpose, however. Visceral wants to take you through the game at its own speed. It doesn't want you to run between objectives, shooting everything in sight, because that would eliminate the atmosphere that it has spent years crafting. It's almost as if you have a developer stood next you at all times shouting 'You will walk slowly, you will be scared when a Necromorph jumps out of nowhere and you will have a spare pair of underwear to hand!'.

The lack of a HUD, too, is a feature that's designed to rip away your 'This is only a videogame' comfort blanket. The developer opts, as before, for ammo and health info to appear via hologram or on the back of the character's RIG. Visceral has gone for full immersion; it takes pride in turning your living room into part of the backdrop. We spoke to John Calhoun, one of *Dead Space 3*'s producers, who told us that even the engine is geared towards creating an atmospheric experience:

"One of the things that we are really proud of is the lighting in our game. We've always had strong dynamic lighting, which we call shadow casters. It allows us to create an atmosphere that I think other games don't put as much effort into. Not to put them down; they just focus their efforts elsewhere. Our games, though, are really about atmosphere, whether we're trying to create tension or action – getting our lighting and our visuals right is very important."

Graphically, the game is impressive and the animations are smooth, as with other *Dead Space* games. Dismembering a Necromorph – still the only way to kill them – and crushing their skulls with the sole of your boot is still one of the most satisfying ways to kill in the game.

Then there's the flipside, the co-operative action side. By his own admission, Calhoun says that the co-operative experience is based around more action. "[It's] twice the action, twice the shooting and twice the carnage, so it's going to feel more actioney".

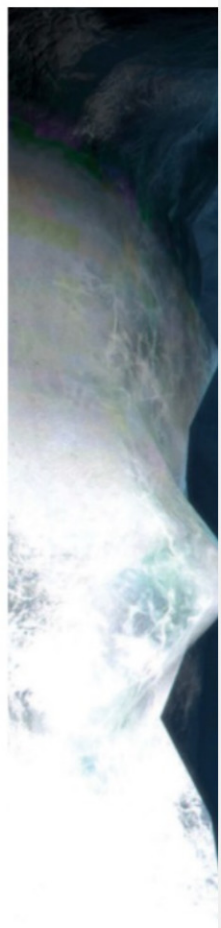
He's right, it does feel more 'actioney'. Playing with that extra player removes the sense of loneliness and dread that you get in single-player and it quite honestly takes away some of the atmosphere. It's only natural to seek out companionship when you're scared; they act as a psychological safety net that catches and traps your fears. In co-op, *Dead Space 3* does feel like a different >



Bits of interactive storytelling are still part of the series' DNA.



Necromorphs are slightly tweaked from previous games.



> game – the horror is still there, it's just noticeably watered down, which may turn veterans off.

Isaac and secondary protagonist Sergeant John Carver have entirely different experiences of the game. Both characters will suffer from hallucinations at some point, which depict their personal descents into madness. However, what John sees will not be the same as what Isaac sees, and they'll often tell each other to get a grip. The way you approach the game also changes from survival to strategy.

Visceral has recognised this and incorporated features into the game that accompany the action side of things. You can pass items, guns and ammo between each other mid-battle to aid the other. John and Isaac can also roll out of the way of enemies and duck into cover, which is a new level of maneuverability that's been missing in previous games. With a well-executed strategy you'll find yourself with more time to enjoy the finer points of the many different weapon variations available, instead of leaping back and firing panic shots into the ether.

Co-op is drop-in drop-out, which means that a friend can join your game whenever you want them to and vice versa. Interestingly, players can jump in at any stage – they don't have to be at the same story point as you to join in your game. For example, a friend who's just bought the game could help you fight the final boss and then return to their own story mission from the beginning. We're not sure why you would want to do that, but you can play through the missions out of order. One possible bonus of doing so would be that any items or weaponry you pick up in your friend's game will be carried over to yours. So you could theoretically equip your character with advanced weaponry that may only be available later in the game and use it from the start. Or you can just set the difficulty level to Easy – it's up to you.

The claustrophobia of dark halls and abandoned space stations is less prominent in *Dead Space 3*, although it still exists. Because this is a large expansive world, you'll be able to collect scrap that's littered around the planet and use it to your advantage. You're equipped with a scavenger bot that makes an *Aliens*-style tracker noise when you're near useful scrap. When the bot is deployed it unfolds itself and goes hunting for anything that may be of use to you. Anything it collects can be seen through the pause menu and used, depending on what it is.

More importantly, the scrap collected can be used to fuse together new weapons. For example, you may want to combine the buzzsaw with the flamethrower to make a new melee weapon. This can all be done at one of the workbenches stationed around the planet. There are also raw resources that can be converted into ammo or health and there are circuits that can be slotted into weapons to give them upgrades.

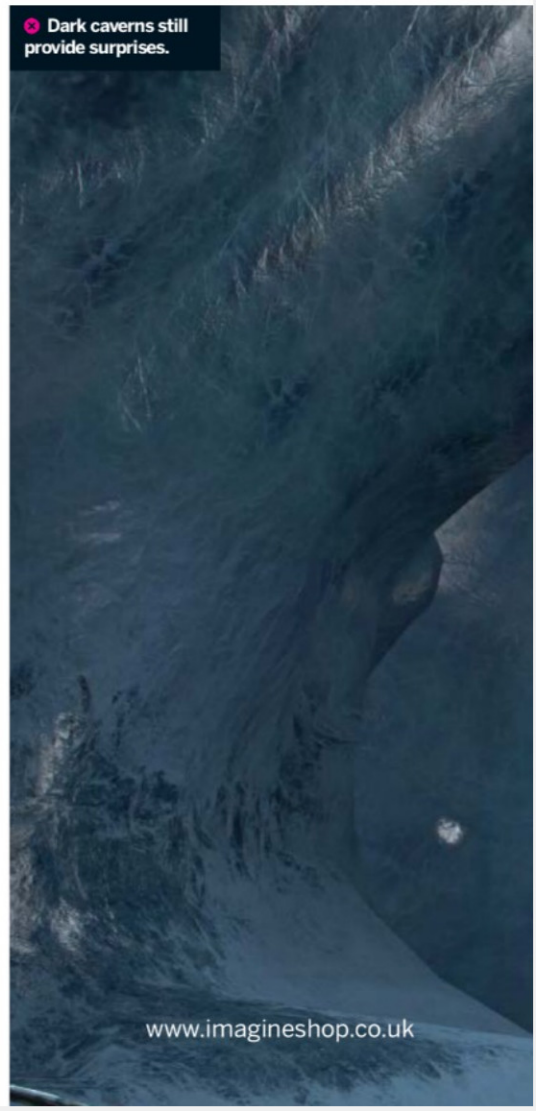
The focus on introducing new, devastating, weaponry to the *Dead Space* arsenal shows Visceral's intentions. There is a market for a sub-genre of survival action horror – even though few games have walked that particular path, *Dead Space 3* shows that it can be done with some class. There are two very different experiences to be had with *Dead Space 3* including, depending on your popularity, a potentially very disjointed one.

The single-player is steeped in survival horror tradition; it's a uniquely atmospheric experience that will take you through the horrors of a hostile unforgiving planet to the horrors of Isaac's descent into madness. Whereas co-op has a sense of urgency to it; one of your primary objectives is to keep your partner alive and/or impress them. You're less focused on the survival and more focused on action.

Having two very different experiences in one game is quite a feat, and it shows how much *Dead Space* has moved on from a shoe-horned multiplayer mode to a proper co-op game that features both action and survival horror.

Dead Space 3 has been developed by Visceral. For more information go to **http://www.deadspace.com/**





Dark caverns still provide surprises.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Live out your wildest MacGyver fantasies by crafting some truly powerful weapons
- Co-op is a truly new experience for the series; it's worth trying at least once
- A new environment and new enemies breathe some life into the series
- Playing alone is still the best way to cure tiredness

READ ME

Isaac (and, in co-op, John Carver) has travelled to hostile icy planet Tau Volantis to discover the source of the Necromorphs and wipe them out once and for all.

www.imagineshop.co.uk



Definitely one of the most impressive Jack-o-lanterns we've ever seen.











VISCERAL GAMES ON CO-OP FEARS

John Calhoun, producer at Visceral

Tell us about *Dead Space 3* – what's new and what can players expect?

Dead Space 3, takes place of a new hostile icy planet called Tau Volantis. This is really new to us because it's a big expansive world. We had to play with new ways to scare player – lizards, a hostile world, things falling down on you. We've still got all of the classic *Dead Space* elements too, like claustrophobic corridors where you go underground. Also we have drop in drop out co-op, which means you can play a single-player game with no AI follower – just Isaac Clarke. But if things get too tough, too scary, you can invite a friend into the co-op through the pause menu and boom, you're playing co-op.

Will players receive a notification that their friend wants to play co-op with them? Like in *Street Fighter* when it screams 'New Challenger!'

Exactly like that. You'll be able to set how you play whether it's private or public, so you don't have to worry about it. But yeah, your friend will say 'Hey, I want to play' and you can say 'Invite' and you can carry on from that checkpoint or start a new game. All of your progress will be saved; it's all consistent so you don't lose anything or get a different set of weapons. Your friend will have the same, so if he plays for you for a couple of levels and anything he earned in those few hours, they will carry into his game too.

What's the scavenger bot?

We don't have credits – if you're familiar with *Dead Space 1* and *2* our main currency were these credits that the CEC, which is a fictional company in our universe, uses. *Dead Space 3* takes place on a really hostile world, so we added resources like tungsten and scrap metal that you can use to craft the tools of survival, like health packs and weapon upgrades. The Scavenger bot goes out and finds these resources.

Would you say *Dead Space* has moved away from survival horror and more into the action genre?

We've grown the amount of gameplay that we have. We are not straying from our roots, which is action horror. What we saw here today was a co-op part of the demo and by its very nature you're playing with someone else so you're going to get twice the action, twice the shooting and twice the carnage so it's going to feel more 'actioney'. If you were to play the same sequence in single-player it's really intense because you're in these dark caverns by yourself and there is no one else's flashlight beside yours.



We thought the last *Army Of Two* would be alright. It wasn't.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH

Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel

A rock-'em, sock-'em, kill-'em, behead-'em shooter

PS3

Play recently got the chance to have hands-on time with all of EA's upcoming games, and our conclusions may surprise you: *Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel* isn't the least impressive one. With reworked mechanics and a knowing appropriation of an Eighties action-movie-style vibe, there's a strong chance this could be the top entry in what has so far been a middling series.

The Devil's Cartel picks up the 'most improved' gong out of EA's four upcoming shooters, which includes *Fuse*, *Crysis 3* and *Dead Space 3*, There were some genuinely encouraging signs of life coming out of the *Army Of Two* play area that raised an eyebrow of intrigue amongst a few of us. 'Revamp' was the message that producer Greg Rizzer (no relation to the Wu-Tang Clan member) wanted to get across in his presentation to the room.

Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel is a less over-the-top, more polished, story-led third-person shooter that has set its sights on the high-octane thrill-seeking gamer. Based around the real-life war on drugs in Mexico, you will play as Alpha and Bravo, operatives for the Tactical Worldwide Operations outfit, who have been drafted in to help wipe out a Mexican drug cartel called the Scythe – in the most offensive way possible.

The game still maintains its core elements of gore, explosions and two-player co-operation. We played with someone we weren't familiar with, but dismembering drug cartel minions would ultimately bring us together like a family Christmas tale of sharing and working together... only with more dismembering, of course.

Co-operation really is key in this game – running out Rambo-style on your lonesome will get you killed, which, to Visceral's credit, was a brave but necessary move. Even the cut-scenes are seen from the point of view of your player. Unfortunately, however, for our teammate, the face of our character had not rendered properly, which prompted him to say "Dude, your face is f***ked". It really was.

We're dropped into an enemy compound with the mission being to wipe the bad guys out. As we sneak up behind some minions, we communicate to each other which one to take out. As soon as their bodies drop to the ground it kicks off. Enemies start coming out of every spawn point visible. This is where the co-operation becomes handy, we're armed with a rifle and our friend is armed with a powerful shotgun. We take cover and draw the fire of distant enemies while our friend flanks them. As we wound them with a rifle he finishes the job by blowing their head off with the shotgun – and yes, their heads really do come off, as do their arms and legs. Clean off.

It appears the 'everything is destructible' attitude has transferred to body parts too, which is a neat little feature. Our co-operation of taking out the same enemy is picking up 'tag team' kill points, which can be spent on weapon upgrades. Similarly, points picked up by either player are shared and can be spent by either player on weapon or appearance upgrades, cementing the necessity for co-operative play.

There is no safe place to hide in *The Devil's Cartel* because most things can be destroyed, including cover, vehicles and conveniently placed tankers of explosive fuel. If you take out enough structures, blow up enough cars and explode enough tankers of fuel then your character goes into something called Overkill, where he becomes invincible and has access to unlimited grenades and ammo for a limited amount of time. In short, this is awesome. You can almost imagine that it is an out-of-body experience for the character as a yellowish overlay takes over the screen and the edges become blurred.

Visceral understands its product. This is by no means anything inventive or groundbreaking, but it is entertaining, and ultimately that's what's important. We spoke to producer Zach Mumbach, who said he's a fan of Eighties action cinema, which definitely translates in the game. Anyone who likes Arnie's back catalogue will take something away from this.

There is a fear, however, that blasting limbs off of enemies could become a bit repetitive and we do worry that there isn't much more to *The Devil's Cartel* than gore. We only played one mission, but there would need to be some more depth to the game to justify a full-price purchase.

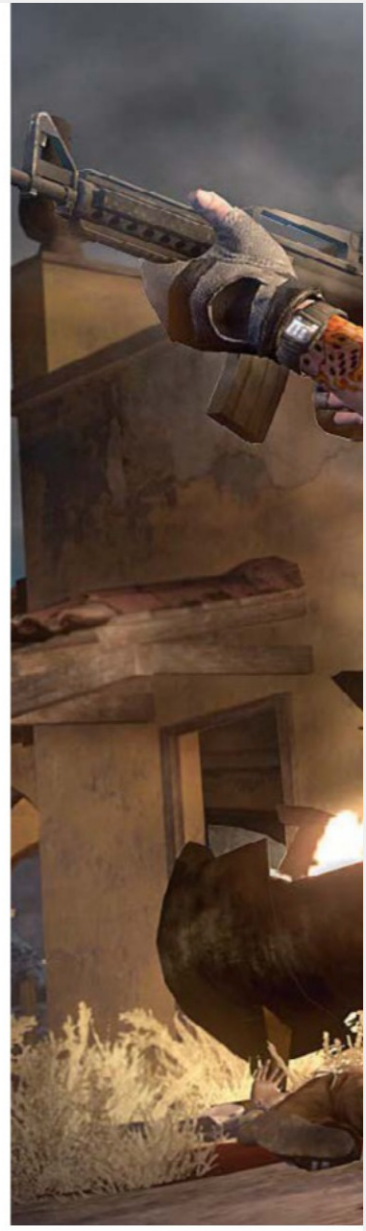
Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel is being developed by Visceral. For more information check out **http://www.armyoftwo.com**

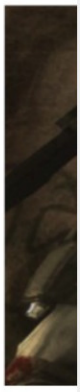
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Co-op is drop-in/drop-out, which means that you can play with anyone online or locally and save your individual progress
- You never learn the names of the operatives
- When you customise your weapon you can try it out at a shooting range before you purchase the upgrades
- Other than Overkill, there's another special mode called 'T.W.O. Vision', which we should learn about soon

READ ME

Visceral has got rappers B.O.B and Big Boy as playable characters for special edition missions.

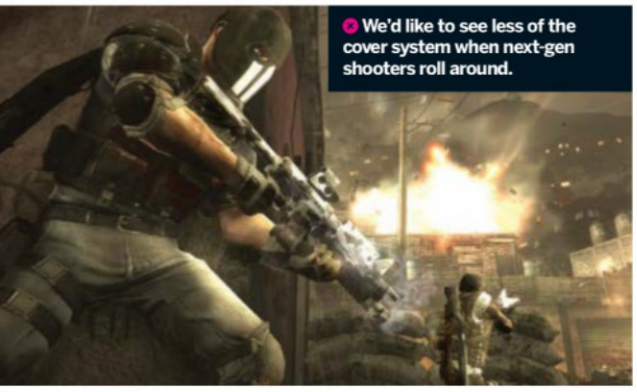






FISTBUMP!

As pretty as the Frostbite engine is, this still looks generic in screenshot form, sadly.



We'd like to see less of the cover system when next-gen shooters roll around.



Could this finally make the *Army Of Two* formula compelling to third-person shooter fans?



Hopefully the Eighties action movie tone will give *Army Of Two* a much-needed sense of irony.

ARMY TALK

We had a quick chat with producer Zach Mumbach to pick his brain about new features in the upcoming sequel

Tell us about the upgrade system. We saw on the HUD a cash meter – how does that work and how does that fit with the upgrade system?
Basically, everyone earns cash in the game. The cash then dictates what your player rank is. One of the ideas we were working with is that there's a lot of upgrades. You've got a ton of guns [to select from] and a ton of attachments for the guns. So the idea is that you can really customise your weapon loadout. So you're left with these decisions, like do you want to sacrifice your weapon performance for a larger magazine clip?

So it's quite intricate then?
Yes, but it's also quite easy to use because all you need to do is earn your money, go in, pick out the pieces that you want and add them [to your gun]. What's really cool too is that you can go out to the shooting range and try your weapon out before you buy it.

Aside from Overkill, are there any other modes?
There's something called T.W.O. Vision, but we can't talk anymore about it.

What about changing the outcome of the game? Towards the end of the mission we played it seemed as though there would be choice on how to proceed to the next part of the game. Have decisions been incorporated?
I can't really talk too much about that right now. *nervously glances over to PR*

Is there a separate multiplayer mode?
There's a mode called Overkillers that comes with the limited edition version of the game. It's all about staying in Overkill and getting as many points as possible.



Here we get a better look at the infected population of Earth.



Expect to see a lot of messed up stuff.



Pop culture influences are easy to find in *The Last Of Us*.

RELEASE DATE: 7 MAY

The Last Of Us

The last word on PS3 exclusives?

PS3

The Last Of Us now has a release date – 7 May! Hooray. We were worried we'd have to wait until the end of 2013 to play it. Anyway, Naughty Dog has reiterated the importance of Ellie to the post-apocalyptic world the game's set in; she's vital cargo, apparently, that Joel has to get across the country. Could she have some kind of blood-related cure for the disease that plagues this world? Maybe. Is that a wild guess? Definitely. Either way, the story has everything to do with her and Joel keeping Ellie safe. A bigger question beckons now, however. With *Beyond: Two Souls* the final big PS3 exclusive on Sony's release schedule (unless *The Last Guardian* comes out), is the PS4 now a certainty for the end of 2013? Either way, *The Last Of Us* looks like a generation-defining blockbuster.

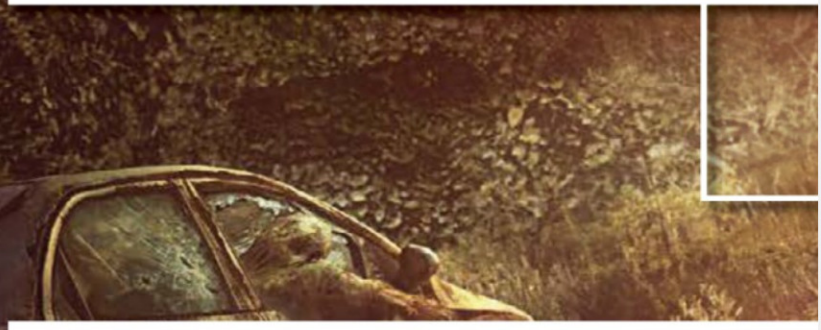
The Last Of Us is developed by the mighty Naughty Dog. Find them here: **www.naughtydog.com**



Naughty Dog apparently insisted that Ellie is on the box art.



Presumably there are some poisonous locations to walk through.





Naughty Dog has made a huge contribution to PS3 sales.

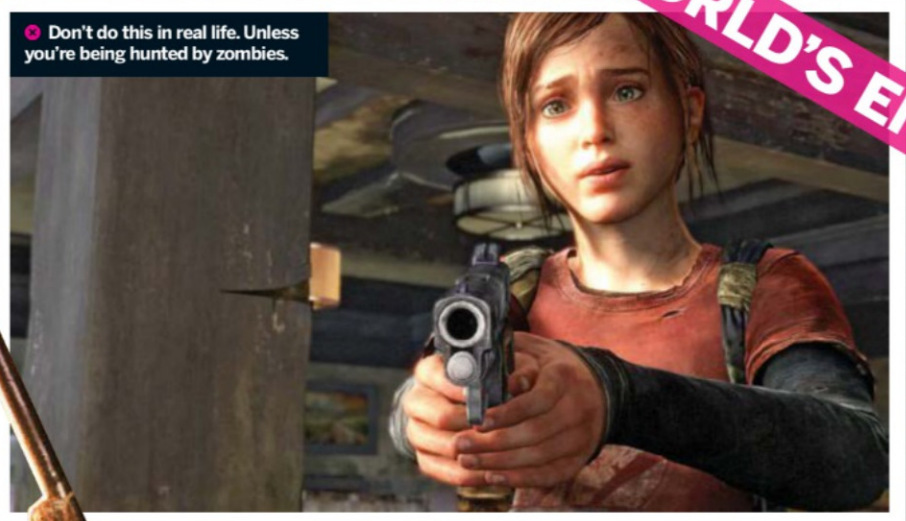
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's Naughty Dog. They don't muck this stuff up. Apart from *Jak X*
- Still promises a different experience to anything else on PS3
- The story looks pretty damn credible for a videogame
- It comes out when nothing else does. Convenient!









Don't do this in real life. Unless you're being hunted by zombies.



Are these the same horses from *Uncharted 3*? NEWS STORY.

READ ME

The Last Of Us **marks the first time Naughty Dog has been a two-game studio. Expect to see alternating teams from the studio working on games in the future.**



THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

What are The Last Of Us's fictional influences?

THERE'S A BIT of *I Am Legend* and *The Road* in *The Last Of Us* – while the concept itself isn't exactly original, and appears trope-driven in a familiar, likeable way to the *Uncharted* series, it tackles the kind of story we've rarely seen done well in games before. With the same level of motion-captured cut-scenes we've come to expect from Naughty Dog, fingers crossed it doesn't let us down come May.



RELEASE DATE: TBA

The Phantom Pain

PS3 Or should that be Metal Gear Solid 5?

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's probably *Metal Gear*-related! If not, it looks cool anyway
- The main character has a mullet (because he's clearly Snake)
- There's a fiery unicorn in it
- It's ruddy scary!

READ ME

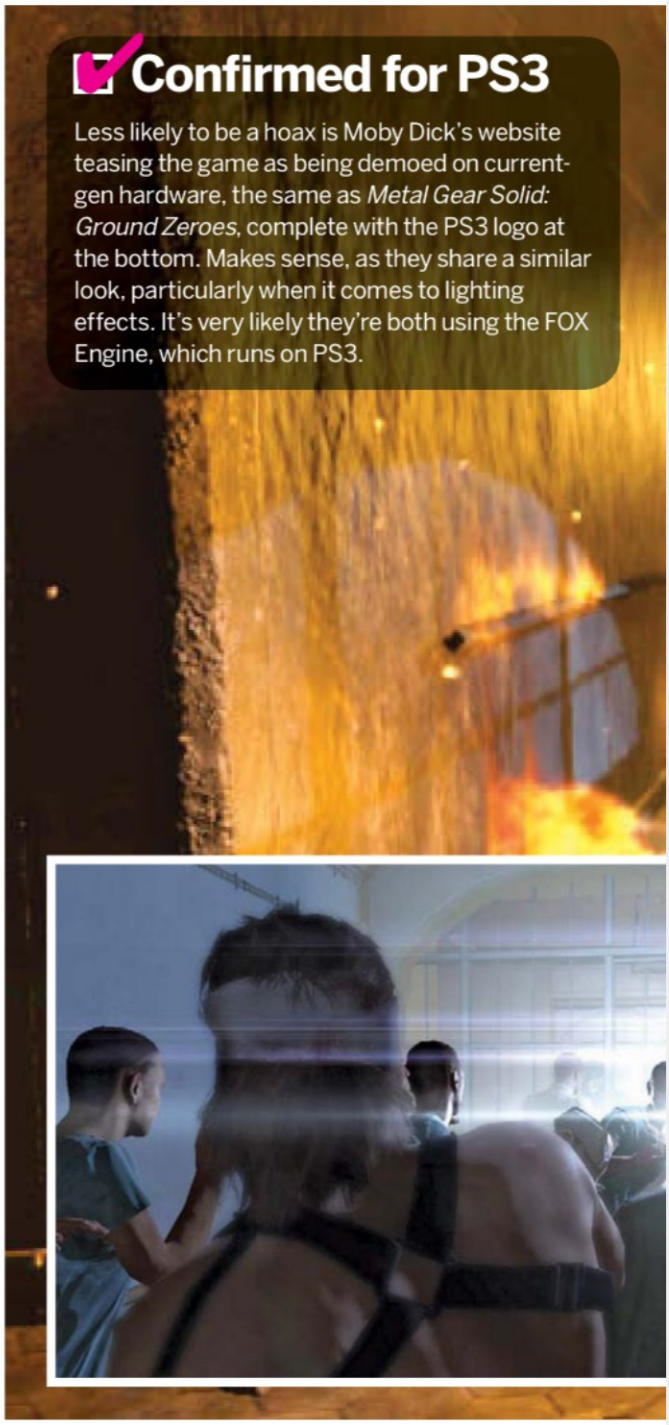
***The Phantom Pain* is an all-new experience designed to touch its audience. Or is it? We should find out very soon.**

Check out one of the most fun viral sites of all time at **www.mobydickstudio.se.**



Confirmed for PS3

Less likely to be a hoax is Moby Dick's website teasing the game as being demoed on current-gen hardware, the same as *Metal Gear Solid: Ground Zeroes*, complete with the PS3 logo at the bottom. Makes sense, as they share a similar look, particularly when it comes to lighting effects. It's very likely they're both using the FOX Engine, which runs on PS3.



Volgin returns?

This chap, who while on fire marches into the hospital where the main character's recovering, bears an awfully strong resemblance to *MGS3*'s main antagonist Volgin, wearing an extremely similar orange armour suit to the one he wears when Snake faces him later in the game. Also, the fact he's on fire tallies with his elemental powers in *Snake Eater* – only then, of course, he was channeling electricity rather than fire. His face is mysteriously covered, which again makes us wonder if the developers have something to hide.







Wild hallucination?

There are several reasons we believe what's been revealed so far could be a hallucination: firstly, the strange fractured tone of the teaser, which has a nightmarish tone to it anyway, but secondly it's the strange imagery. The biggest hint that it's all a dream to us is the appearance of a unicorn. Kojima's a fan of *Blade Runner* (just play *Snatcher* to find out how much), and he's bound to appreciate the iconography of that film's particular dream sequence – it could also be a reference to The Boss's horse from *MGS3*.

A new IP

Here's what we're baffled by: if this is indeed *Metal Gear Solid 5*, a totally different game to *Ground Zeroes*, then that would mean we'd be looking at three *Metal Gear* installments being released in the near future. It would also likely mean that Project Ogre was never a new IP from Kojima to begin with. While we're excited by the idea of more *Metal Gear* games, we suspect Kojima could come up with one hell of a new concept.

This is Snake

Yes, we know his left hand has been cut off in this trailer, but the main guy in *The Phantom Pain* teaser has a mullet. That already narrows it down to two characters: Solid Snake or Naked Snake. Given that Kojima already declared *Ground Zeroes* was the prelude to *Metal Gear Solid 5*, it seems fairly obvious that this will mark the return once more of Big Boss – provided this doesn't all turn out to be a red herring for an entirely different project (which is highly unlikely).

'Moby Dick' Studio

Some more indicators that this is a Kojima project – a fake website for *The Phantom Pain*'s developer, Moby Dick Studio, declares its obviously fake CEO as 'Joakim Mogren'. Joakim is an anagram of Kojima. Mogren has two potential meanings: one, it contains the word 'Ogre', and Project Ogre is the working title of Kojima's previously discussed game. Two, Mogren is the name of a football club in Montenegro (well, they're FK Mogren). Montenegro is where *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* begins.

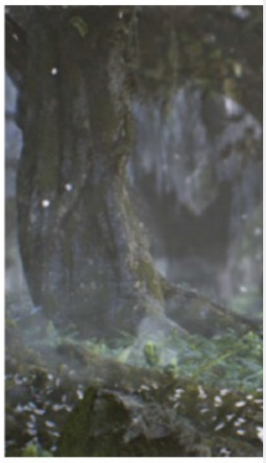
Must be MGS5

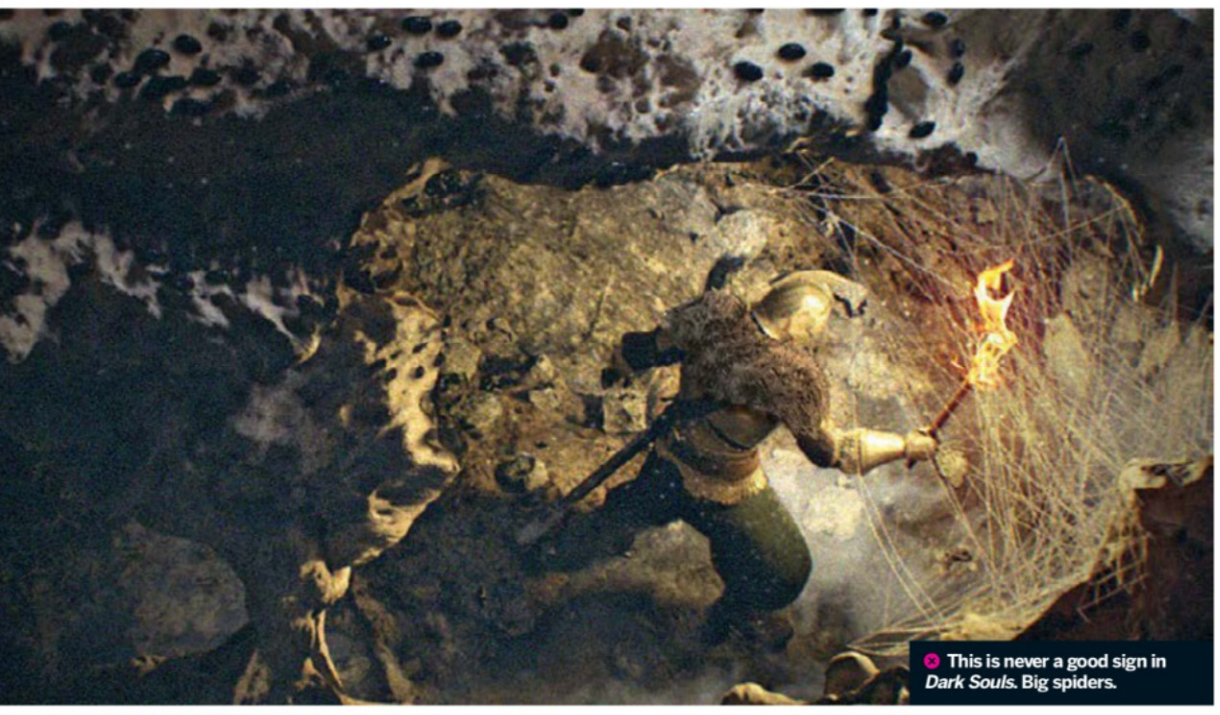
The logo has a few lines running off the characters, which, when lined up in the appropriate font, obviously spell out 'Metal Gear Solid V'. It's a dead giveaway. To add fuel to the fire, at the VGAs, where the game was revealed, Konami employees were seen wearing 'Moby Dick Studios' T-shirts, including Kyle Cooper, the designer of the credits sequences in *MGS2* and *MGS3*. It's clearly an elaborate bit of viral marketing (and mighty fun, too).



No doubt there are lots of things here that'll kill you.







This is never a good sign in *Dark Souls*. Big spiders.







CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

How Dark Souls changed us as players

A LOT OF people who never gunned for a Platinum Trophy in their life became obsessed with beating *Dark Souls* – the difference between conquering *Dark Souls* and any old game on a hard difficulty is that it's ultimately a fair challenge, in spite of the ludicrous boss battles. It's simply crafted with that idea in mind, and that makes it easy to admire.



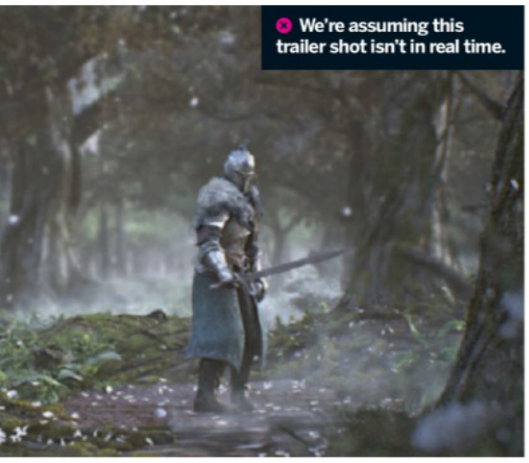


We can't wait to hear more about the sequel's new setting.





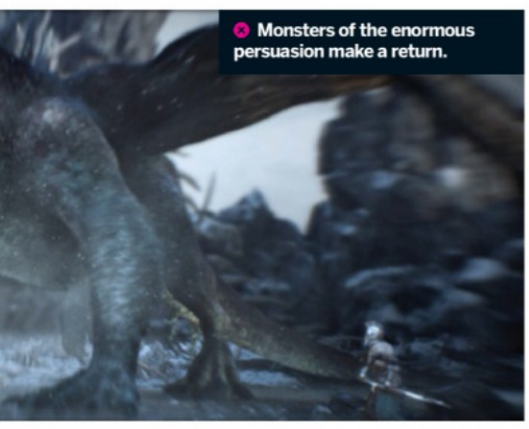
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We're assuming this trailer shot isn't in real time.







Monsters of the enormous persuasion make a return.



RELEASE DATE: TBA 2013

Dark Souls II

Prepare to die again and again and again (again)

PS3

Dark Souls II is guaranteed and on-the-way for PlayStation 3. After significant commercial success with *Demon's Souls* and then the spiritual successor *Dark Souls*, FromSoftware's series has found a quite extraordinary niche in being the game that dares to challenge people in an industry full of titles that checkpoint you after every step. What used to be commonplace suddenly seemed fresh, and, when married to the extraordinary Network hint element of the game, became something that was simultaneously old school and forward-thinking – an action-adventure RPG hybrid that we could really fall in love with.

So, you'll be pleased to know that challenge is still on the agenda with *Dark Souls II* – while there have been some stirrings about making the game more 'approachable', this is most likely with the intent of bringing in new players, which is a priority for any developer, even one making a game tailored towards such a specific audience like this. The note of contention a lot of people have is that FromSoftware figurehead and franchise creator Hidetaka Miyazaki is supervising, rather than directing this time around; we'll see over time whether this starts to have an impact on the way the game is fashioned.

For now, it's impossible to tell. The dark fantasy art direction makes a punchy return here, though the world and characters are completely new. As much as anything, *Dark Souls* was about surprises, finding that colossal enemy or incredible vista lurking around the corner, and creating a sense of adventure that the less-sprawling *Demon's Souls* didn't quite have. We want this sequel to build on that sense of challenging the unknown – and creating an entirely new strand of mythology seems like a handy way to do that.

Publisher NamcoBandai is promising that 'devilish new obstacles' await players, and that the sense of difficulty won't be lost in the midst of drawing in all-new users. The most fascinating change is to the hint-sharing feature, which, without going into too much detail, will apparently be 'revamped' with a twist that still matches the DNA of the series. There's a lot of scope to play around with that blind relationship that players have with one another, and it's something we encourage to stop the franchise from resting on its laurels.

We're just pleased that we get to play another game like this. *Dark Souls* offers a pleasure and pain feedback loop – all right, it's more like pain, pain, pain and then pleasure – that no other experiences does on PS3, but it's much more than just a notoriously difficult grind. If *Dark Souls II* is anything like its predecessor, it'll be a world-class adventure as well, a step into a provocative, atmospheric world that tells a story in the very fibre of its being. It's another key ingredient of why the series remains so magical, and we're confident *Dark Souls II* can retain this.

We're expecting *Dark Souls II* to drop around Christmas time, before the PlayStation 4 gets here. Still, if Miyazaki isn't directing this one, it makes you wonder what else he could be working on – no doubt something equally innovative. For now, though, we're still far from being bored of the formula behind *Dark Souls II*, and anything that stirs up the multiplayer side of things can only be healthy for the franchise. We're willing to put our life on hold again for this. Bring on the pain.

Learn more about **Dark Souls II**, a FromSoftware game, at **www.DarkSoulsII.com**.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It'll still be rock-hard, of course
- A shift in setting and characters, so we can expect the unexpected
- The hints system will undergo a redesign
- We like pain, apparently

READ ME

FromSoftware actually publishes the game in Japan, as well as developing it. And now you know.



RELEASE DATE: 27 MARCH

Sly Cooper: Thieves In Time

An inconclusive argument for bringing back the cane

PS3

If there's a single moment in the first hour of *Thieves In Time* where one of the characters isn't talking, we must somehow have missed it. The entire Paris tutorial stage is set to the sound of either Bentley's geeky drone or Sly's tiresome wisecracks, each overeager to explain the simplest of gameplay mechanics and tell you how to do things you've already done several times. Later, this is drowned out by constant shouting from resident idiot hippo Murray. Whatever you find yourself tasked with doing, you can be damn sure that one or more of the three will have something to say about it. And that something is very rarely as amusing, useful or interesting as it thinks it is.

Using the same mould Sucker Punch made for *Sly 2*, new developer Sanzaru Games has crafted something that feels instantly familiar. Levels – here taking the form of periods of the past where one of Sly's ancestors needs to be saved – are sizeable open worlds around which loads of trinkets are hidden, while the three-character approach of previous games also returns. Titular raccoon Sly's the sneaky, agile one, flipping off scenery and able to scale the greatest heights in what are some impressively vertical locations, with free-running elements and advanced platforming simplified down to just a couple of buttons. It's like a version of *Assassin's Creed* that casts a cartoon animal in the lead role instead of a historical figure in a hoodie. Bentley relies more on gadgets – he starts with a motorised wheelchair and infinite bombs and they get sillier as the game goes on. Murray is a melee monster – just wail on the Square button until everything at ground level is dead, at which point you can give your thumb a rest.

This division of duties works well, although playing as anyone that isn't Sly for an extended period can feel enclosed and restrictive. It's for this reason that missions where the team must be used together hold up best – there's no hot-swapping between characters or co-op (well, not that we've encountered so far, anyway) but the division of sections tends to be such that you're seldom forced to wear out either of the gimmick characters' shoes for too long at a time. Each has abilities that offer up routes, secrets and strategies exclusive to them in the open world section, to be fair, though there's little more frustrating than stumbling across a clue bottle (which still arbitrarily open safes when collected in vast enough quantities) that your current hero can't reach.

Unless, that is, you've got your Vita to hand. In a clever ploy to ease frustration and give that lovely little handheld something to do, it can here be used to analyse photos taken in-game, often pointing out cunningly hidden secrets or routes, and it's even capable of remotely collecting goodies in some cases. Couple this with the Cross-Buy incentive (which gives owners the Vita version of the game as well) and Cross-Save support that allows seamless continued play across the two devices, and it's fair to say that no game showcases better synergy between PS3 and Vita than *Thieves In Time*.

There's an odd irony to this forward-thinking and current functionality though, because the rest of the game would struggle to be stuck any more firmly in the past. Sanzaru's last release was the *Sly HD* collection, and whether due to misplaced reverence for Sucker Punch's work (which, in fairness, was awesome back in the day) or simply a fear of changing things up too drastically as the new team at the helm, there's little here on a gameplay level that reflects the eight years of gaming trends, improvements and possibilities that have passed since Sly hung up his mask.

Thieves In Time seems thematically confused, as well. Staccato stings and horn flourishes work just fine with the usual retro Parisian backdrop and vibe, but place them in a Feudal Japan setting and they can't help but feel off-key. The time travel theme gives the game limitless possibilities but with little in the way of difference between the gameplay of each, they're really just different coloured backgrounds against which to hit or avoid a handful of reskinned enemy archetypes.

In sticking so rigidly to an outdated template, there's a real danger that *Thieves In Time* could see Sly return somewhat less bright-eyed and bushy-tailed than we remember. Granted, we've only played the first few hours so far but, even towards the end of our session, hand-holding was as relentless as it was in that talkative opening section, while we'd still seen nothing that suggested any kind of evolution for the franchise.

It's still capable of entertaining when it all comes together, mind, so here's hoping things improve when everybody finally shuts the hell up and lets the game speak for itself.

Sanzaru has lifted the **Sly Cooper** franchise from Sucker Punch – head over to the website for more info: **www.slycooper.com**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Three characters, each with unique play styles
- Huge open environments with loads to find and do
- AR functionality, using Vita to take and analyse photos that help locate collectibles
- Cross-Buy means that buyers also get the Vita version for free

READ ME

Sly's family history is being erased – travel back in time to right the wrongs his lineage is suffering, mostly by stealing stuff and hitting it with a cane until it explodes into coins.



The blue glow on objects indicates which can be traversed easily by Sly using the Circle button.



Each time period has its own costume for Sly to wear, granting different generic videogame abilities.



Playing as Murray is tedious as hell – he gets so much health back from enemies and crates that he can't really die.





The cartoon stylings aren't the worst we've seen but with *Ni No Kuni* out there, there's no comparison.

THIEVES THROUGH TIME

A bluffer's guide to the franchise



SLY RACCOON (PS2, 2003)

The sneaky raccoon's debut was a real head-turner when it launched a decade ago. Its beautiful cel-shaded look and original (in gaming, at least) premise made for a memorable twist on the ever-popular 3D platformer – definitely one of the most interesting original games of the PS2 boom.



SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES (PS2, 2004)

A warm reception and decent sales of the original led to an inevitable follow-up, though this would be no lazy level pack. Sucker Punch completely reworked the structure of the game and by making Murray and Bentley playable, criticisms of the original's repetitive nature were skillfully brushed away.



SLY 3: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES (PS2, 2005)

Adding even more playable characters into the mix and bolting on a multiplayer mode weren't exactly the improvements we were looking for in a sequel. While still enjoyable, you got the feeling that Sucker Punch was starting to run out of steam, or at least that Sly's world and premise had nothing new to offer.



THE SLY TRILOGY (PS3, 2010)

The celebrated threesome finally found its way to PlayStation 3 a few years back, with decent HD remasters giving the games a chance to impress a whole new generation of players. While the individual titles show their age a little today, the package as a whole is still great value.

DRAC'S BACK



RELEASE DATE: TBA

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2

Out for the Count

PS3

Something of a soft reboot by Konami, the original *Lords Of Shadow* put *Castlevania* in a credible 3D space for the first time ever, while the endorsement of Hideo Kojima no doubt helped it shift a few units to new fans for the first time.

The second one builds on that, with Gabriel Belmont now established as Dracula and facing a threat years after the original game – it's billed as the 'shocking conclusion' to this sub-series (didn't it just begin?).

Dracula wakes up with the Belmont clan on his back. After a long sleep, he's been left weak, and no doubt ready for blood – that's about all we know story-wise, at this stage. What's a little odd is that Konami has readily declared this the final entry in the series that MercurySteam is making, despite having all the hallmarks of a great start with the first game (to the tune of a lovely 85%) and years of *Castlevania* languishing as a 3D proposition. Producer David Cox promises that this entry will be tighter, with less of the gameplay flab that broke up the pace of the original *Lords Of Shadow*.

Yet it's not just the principle of a more fluid *Castlevania* that we're looking forward to – it's how damn good the game looks. The original *LOS* was no visual slouch, but here we're looking at high-end in-game screenshots that rank among the best-looking we've seen on PlayStation 3. That's not exactly something we were expecting from *Lords Of Shadow 2*, but it's a wonderful bonus, and only heightens our interest in a sequel to one of the generation's best surprises. We should learn a lot more about the next *Castlevania* within the next couple of months – keep an eye on **Play**.

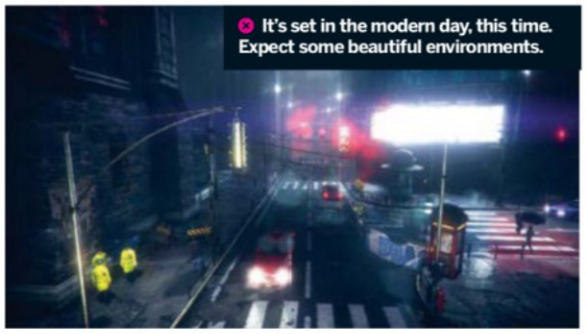
Find out more about **Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2** at **www.konami-castlevania.com**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Builds on the formula in the first, excellent *Lords Of Shadow*
- The only 2013 game that stars Dracula
- Visuals have undergone a serious upgrade
- *Castlevania* is good again!

READ ME

The original *Lords Of Shadow* started out as a new IP with that name, before transforming into a reboot for a then-MIA *Castlevania* franchise.



It's set in the modern day, this time. Expect some beautiful environments.



He's played by Robert Carlyle, remember. The actor best-known for *Stargate Universe*.

END OF THE LINE?

Why stop making Lords Of Shadow games now, then?

THE MESSAGE ABOUT the new *Castlevania* is kind of confused – while not a smash hit, the original game did shift in excess of a million copies. Perhaps this can be attributed to Konami quitting while it's ahead. "*LOS2* is the end of the saga and we are not making any more," producer David Cox said, answering a fan on Twitter. Maybe if the second one sells, Konami will have a change of heart.

1 OUTRAGEOUSLY FUNNY

Matt Stone and Trey Parker provide the script and the voice acting, and despite the occasional inconsistency, *South Park* is a show that's managed to remain fresh for many years. While its audience peak came in the late Nineties, it's actually a more cutting-edge piece of entertainment now than it ever used to be before – especially savvy when it comes to dissecting pop culture, which *The Stick Of Truth* does to high fantasy, creating a backdrop of wizards vs elves that just gives Cartman the perfect justification to be a massive dick. We're going to laugh. Heartily. Until it hurts. Or, we'll demand our money back.



2 LOOKS BEAUTIFUL

We're actually looking forward to exploring the different parts of the town, too, which has been mapped out for the first time. It'll be a lot better than exploring Springfield in *The Simpsons: Hit And Run*, since the game adheres so much to the visual style of the show – that wouldn't be such a big deal considering how simple *South Park* looks, but we're still at the point where it's never been done properly before, so there's still a nice novelty to that. Expect every past show reference under the sun to find its way in there, too.



RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 2013



MARIOESQUE

The encounters in *South Park* look like typical RPG-style turn-based fare, but with a real-time twist that's clearly inspired by the *Mario & Luigi* games – when enemies attack, you can counter if you get the timing right. It just keeps you on your toes, disguising a combat system that could otherwise be out of date, and it's worked well enough for Nintendo's RPGs to earn them a big fan base. No wonder *Costume Quest* borrowed the same mechanic, and with character-specific attacks it'll make a ton of sense in *South Park*, too.

South Park: The Stick Of Truth

Bigger, longer and uncut

PS3

We'll be so angry if *South Park: The Stick Of Truth* turns out to be less fun that it looks. Every bit of footage we've seen of the game has delighted us, and we're never disappointed by Obsidian. This is an ideal combination. It seems like *The Stick Of Truth* will be as big a gift to *South Park* fans as *Arkham City* was to Batman devotees – something that captures the uncompromising nature of a beloved intellectual property.

Read more about **South Park: The Stick Of Truth** at **www.stickoftruth.com.**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Looks like the show
- Written like the show
- Sounds like the show
- Is ironically offensive like the show

READ ME

South Park: The Stick Of Truth **will probably come out around July or August 2013, and is the first Obsidian release since *Dungeon Siege III*.**

METAL GEAR RISING

WE'VE ALMOST COMPLETED METAL GEAR RISING: REVENGEANCE, THE KOJIMA SERIES' FANCIFUL FLIGHT INTO DEVIL MAY CRY TERRITORY – HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW...

> "FROM THE OFF, IT'S GLORIOUSLY APPARENT THAT METAL GEAR RISING IS THE PERFECT BASTARDISATION OF KOJIMA'S BATSHIT METAL GEAR UNIVERSE AND PLATINUM'S OVER-THE-TOP STYLISTIC SENSIBILITIES"

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REVENGEANCE

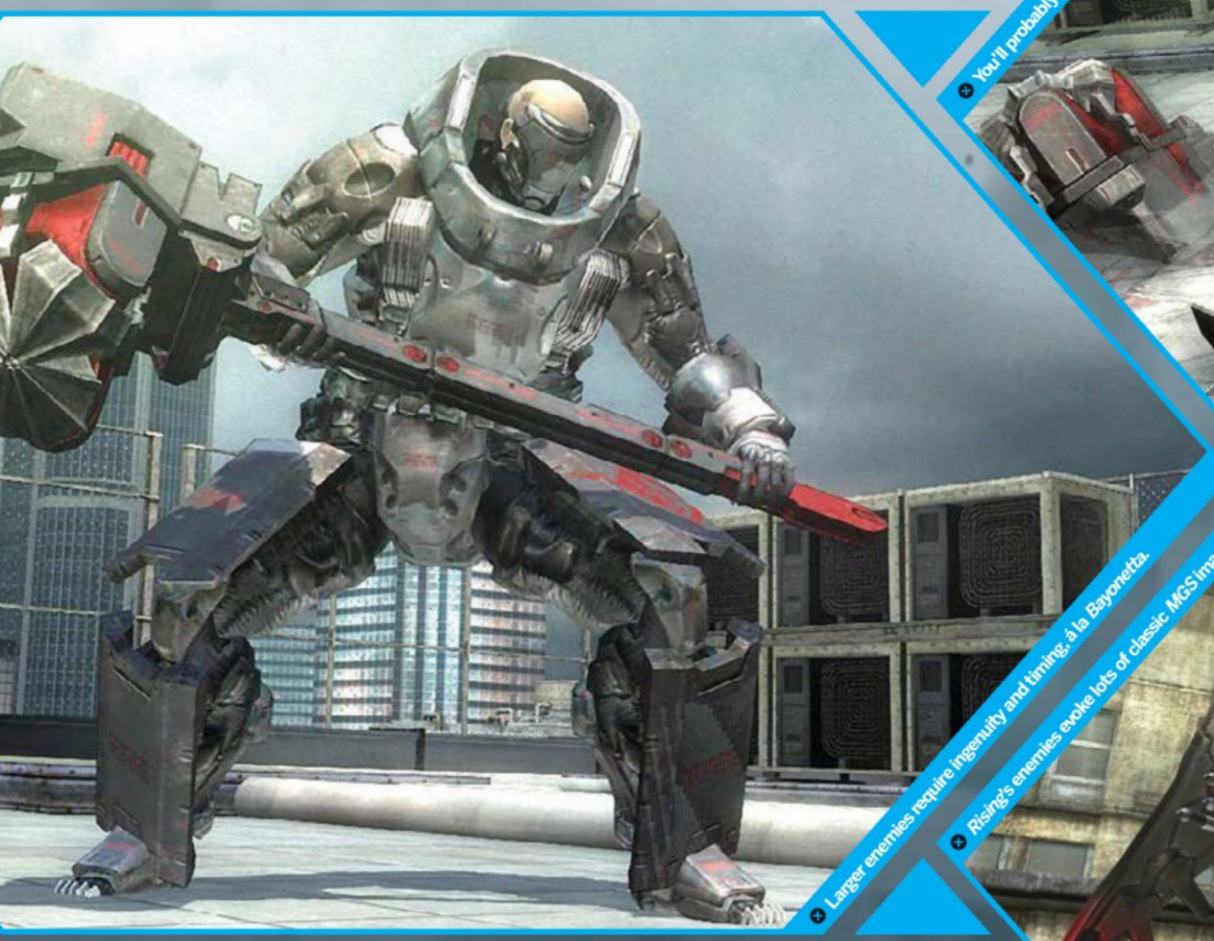
NINJA RAIDEN

It's no secret that *Metal Gear Rising*'s had a tough time trying to launch. Initially revealed in 2009 as *Metal Gear Solid: Rising*, it got people salivating at the thought of playing sneaky-sneaky choppy-choppy as the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise's secondary protagonist Raiden. The videos looked good and showed Raiden slicing through anything and everything (like watermelons and... people) but after that, all went silent. Nothing was heard for a hell of a long time, and the worst was assumed. Rumours began to spread that it had been aborted by the father of *Metal Gear* and design genius Hideo Kojima, after his team at Kojima Productions allegedly couldn't maintain the free slicing mechanic throughout the whole game. Tears were shed and everyone was prepared to move on and wait for the inevitable *Metal Gear Solid 5* for their next slice (pun possibly intended) of main console tactical espionage action.

Thankfully though, a chance encounter at an industry shindig resulted in the game being rebooted under the watchful eye of development wunderkinds Platinum Games, responsible for two of the best action games this generation, namely *Bayonetta* and the peerless *Vanquish*. The newly (and brilliantly) monikered *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* was revealed at the tail end of 2011 and received a cool reception from the *Metal Gear* hardcore upon its re-emergence, with people claiming the trailer was far too over the top for *Metal Gear* (which is pretty strange when you consider it's a franchise that featured bosses like a fat man on roller skates and a guy that chucked bees at you), but those people were wrong headed in the extreme. With the firepower behind it, there was no danger of the game being bad, but even by Platinum and Kojima's own high standards, *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* is an incredible game, and already at this stage is pretty likely to dismember all other competitors to sit at the peak of countless Game Of The Year charts.

It's set a few years after the end of *Metal Gear Solid 4*, after all our favourite cod philosophising, flatulent heroes set off on their merry way to live, erm, happily ever after. Raiden's story in particular was fairly heartwarming, the grumpy cyborg reunited with his wife and son. Surely he could ride off into the sunset with his family and live out the rest of his days in non-homicidal bliss? >





Larger enemies require ingenuity and timing, à la *Bayonetta*.



You'll probably die a lot, just to warn you right now.



Rising's enemies evoke lots of classic MGS imagery.



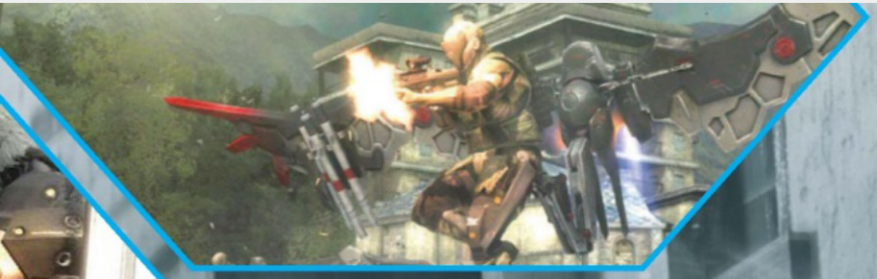
> Well, no, actually, and thank God for that.

Cyborgs are suddenly everywhere in the world, and used to maintain peace. Raiden's been training these cyborgs for a benevolent Prime Minister in a country piecing itself back together after the fall of the Patriots. It's all very happy and amiable, and they have a nice chat about the philosophies of war and killing (it wouldn't be a *Metal Gear* game without any of that, and *Rising*'s no exception), but then they get ambushed. A bunch of other cyborgs turn up and absolutely annihilate the hired help, and the Prime Minister is kidnapped. Then Raiden steps in.

Raiden was always 'the other guy' in the *Metal Gear Solid* games, the one always moaning or coming across as a bit of a tit that couldn't do anything right. He was basically used in *Metal Gear Solid 2* to make Snake look as cool as possible. Things improved in *MGS4* when he became the cyborg ninja, but it was still the Solid Snake show. *Metal Gear Rising*, however, sees Raiden not so much emerge from Snake's shadow, but leap out, high-frequency katana swinging, dead cyborg roadkill between his teeth screaming 'This is my show now!'.

And what a show it is. After hacking and slashing his way through waves of cannon fodder in an attempt to save his employer, all at a gloriously smooth and responsive 60 frames per second, he's only confronted by a bloody Metal Gear RAY! It's probably the grandest opening to a game since the brawl on the falling clock in Bayonetta (seeing a pattern here?). The encounter itself is immense fun, and only the dourest of idiots wouldn't find themselves grinning like a simpleton. Dumbbell heavy metal kicks in and Metal Gear RAY swings at Raiden, but it can't hit him, because he's too damn fast. Pressing the R1 button sees Raiden engage in a lightning-quick sprint that has him traversing the environment like a lunatic cyborg Ezio. He'll automatically deflect gunfire with his sword in this state too, and we'll be damned if it isn't the coolest-looking thing on the planet. His offensive moves are equally as ostentatious. Anyone familiar with action games like *Bayonetta* or *Devil May Cry* will feel at home, as there's a timed input system with the combos. There's also a heavy attack input, which sees Raiden clip the sword to his feet and use his legs to lay waste to the opposition. But it's the 'Blade Mode' mechanic that really sets Rising apart from other games of this ilk. Holding down the left trigger will place the camera behind Raiden and put him into slow motion, giving you the freedom to cut the enemy into as many pieces as you want (cut in the correct place and you can

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It's Platinum, so don't expect an easy ride.

recharge by stealing your quarry's electrolytes). Blade Mode can also be triggered by successfully parrying, which is done by pressing the attack button at the same time as you're being attacked. The Metal Gear RAY encounter, believe it or not, is only the tutorial for all of this, and it results in Raiden chucking the bipedal behemoth hundreds of feet into the air and tearing it to shreds. Clearly this isn't your daddy's *Metal Gear*.

Blade Mode can also result in some comedy genius too. Most enemies need weakening by conventional means (softening through combos) before you can trigger Blade Mode successfully. After limbs start flashing blue, though, they're all yours, and you can lop away to your black little heart's content. One particular enemy that Raiden brutalised was left without legs or arms, and proceeded to admonish the silver-haired hero with the kind of language we'd never use in front of our grandmothers. Seeing this enemy inch up towards Raiden with nothing but stumps, cussing him bad, ranks as one of the funniest moments in gaming we've seen for a long time.

It helps that Raiden's pretty likable in *Metal Gear Rising* too. No longer is he the whining dipstick engaging in interminable conversations about dinner or Godzilla with Rose over Codex. He's grown up, and is funny (everyone's seen the sombrero/poncho scene by now), dry, and the further you get through *Rising* the more invested you are in his tale. Without revealing anything, he certainly doesn't have it easy throughout *Rising*, and it becomes personal. There are moments where he easily eclipses the Snake lineage to become the absolute baddest bastard in the *Metal Gear* universe.

From the off, it's gloriously apparent that *Metal Gear Rising* is the perfect bastardisation of Kojima's batshit *Metal Gear* universe and Platinum's over-the-top stylistic sensibilities. They're a match made in Heaven, and in a world where every other protagonist looks like Nathan Drake and is stuck behind cover taking potshots at bad guys, there's something liberating about pelting it full speed at a gargantuan nuclear tank armed with nothing but a sword. We worry that by setting the bar so high early on, *Metal Gear Rising* is in danger of plateauing too soon, but Platinum has far too much game design savvy to let that happen, and *Metal Gear Rising* (for the seven or >

GUILTY PARTIES

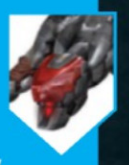
Raiden's not doing this alone, as just like Snake the elder and Snake the younger, he has his own team providing support and crappy jokes over Codec. He's also got his own band of misfits to face off against. Here's just a few of the many wonderful idiots you'll be chatting to/slicing up etc.



BORIS Boris is the Colonel Campbell of the group, although unlike the prim and proper Campbell, Boris likes to get involved, and sounds on the verge of orgasm when Raiden annihilates Metal Gear RAY in the tutorial. He's a jovial fella, and has a sweet moustache that makes him look like the chap from *Parks And Recreation*. It's an American thing.



DOKTOR Doktor is Raiden's, er, doctor. He's the chap that sorts Raiden out with his stylin' new suit after his other one gets mulched in the tutorial by someone else in this list. He has a borderline sociopathic need for the left arms of anyone Raiden destroys, although it's just for data collection. Is responsible for a genuine 'laugh out loud' moment in the game too, as he says something which leaves Raiden a bit perplexed.



BLADEWOLF You know you're onto a winner when you're playing a computer game with a character called BLADEWOLF. Mister Wolf is one of the first bosses encountered by our Raiden and true to form he's a tough little bastard. He's also extremely clever though, so Raiden decides it'd be a waste to scrap him, and gets the Doktor to rebuild him and make him less volatile with his chainsaw tail thing. Does recon for and has philosophical conversations with Raiden in between all that lovely dismemberment.



MISTRAL Mistral's one of the cyborg enemies that Raiden squares off against, and she's not easy (in the boss fight sense not in the... oh you know). Her weapon is a staff/sword/whip thing fashioned from the hands of the tiny little robots that are a complete bugger in certain areas. Her boss fight is fairly redolent of something out of *Bayonetta*, as it moves from area to area. Anything that's like *Bayonetta* is bound to be brilliant.



SAMUEL Samuel's the cyborg that bears an uncanny resemblance to Raiden's nemesis in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, Vamp, although he's much easier going than Vamp, a carefree expression and cheeky grin broadening across his face as he nonchalantly murders anyone in his way. He's the one that leaves Raiden in a bad state at the start, thus forcing our hero to upgrade his suit and get all slash happy, so in a way we should thank him for giving us all that homicidal fun.

TOUCH OF MADNESS

PLATINUM HAS PROVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN IT CAN DO NO WRONG. COULD THE STUDIO COME IN AND ADD ITS MIDAS TOUCH TO A FEW MORE FRANCHISES AS WELL?

1. DEVIL MAY CRY

An obvious one, but surely most people are crying out for this? Ninja Theory's *DmC* will definitely prove a lot of doubters wrong, but if Capcom is busy putting 18 main characters in the next *Resident Evil* it could do worse than get Platinum Games in for the next iteration in the adventures of original Dante. After all, the guy that basically invented *Devil May Cry* (Hideki Kamiya) is on the team, so not only would we get an amazing game, but imagine how happy all those horrible idiots that wanted Ninja Theory to fail would be too? Would undoubtedly have J-rock.





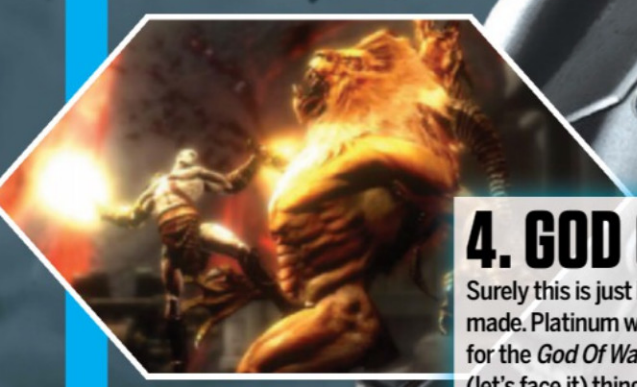
2. UNCHARTED

Obviously it's a monster hit already and the formula works pretty well, but fairly soon the series is going to wear out its welcome. A Platinum-developed *Uncharted* would be a brilliant reignition for the series. Drake could wear a catsuit type thing, use completely ludicrous professional wrestling moves and constantly make references to his penis and thrust his groin to taunt enemies. All the while listening to J-rock.



3. HEAVY RAIN

No it's not a franchise, but with Platinum on board it could be. David Cage's orange-juice-drinking QTE-fest could be given a new lease of life with a Platinum-developed sequel, as a new Origami Killer emerges, only this time he's in a 50-foot mech powered by ancient magical runes. And he's a vampire. You'd still have QTEs for shaving and drinking milk and that, but there would be J-rock and people with swords in the scenes too.



4. GOD OF WAR

Surely this is just begging to be made. Platinum would do wonders for the *God Of War* franchise, as (let's face it) things had started to get a bit stale by the time *God Of War 3* rolled along, despite how good it was. *God Of War* was already violent and over-the-top anyway, so Platinum would really just need to spruce up the combat and give Kratos a smashing new hairdo. Also J-rock.

5. TOMB RAIDER

They've gone all grim and 'survival' with the new *Tomb Raider* game, so once they've gone down that route Square Enix could get Platinum to come in and spearhead another new direction. Give Lara Croft a jetpack and a katana and bring the dinosaurs and monsters back, and you have a guaranteed million seller. With a J-rock soundtrack.





> IT PROVES BEYOND ALL SHADOW OF DOUBT, THAT HIDEO KOJIMA'S FRANCHISE CAN BRANCH OFF AND SUCCEED WITHOUT A SNAKE HISSING AWAY

Rising is mercilessly brutal when you slice enemies up.

The original promise of being able to slice anything is fulfilled.

Hopefully everyone will love Raiden after this.

> so hours played) was consistently fun, and often pretty breathtaking.

People that took issue with the long cut-scenes in previous *Metal Gear* entries will find less to moan about here. They're here, and there's an interesting (if pretty ludicrous) story to be enjoyed as well, but there's a lot less of the bum-numbing tea-break monologues that have occasionally plagued Kojima's other games. With Platinum at the reins, things are a lot more taut and focused. It's more than apparent that this was designed by the people responsible for the relentless action in *Vanquish*.

At its busiest, *Metal Gear Rising* is incredibly frenetic and exciting, but (and *Metal Gear* luddites can breathe a haughty sigh of relief here) Platinum is well aware that it pays to dial back on the action sometimes, and you're afforded the opportunity in some missions to let Raiden sneak past enemies. You can even equip a cardboard box for old time's sake, and contact people on your codec. It's testament to Platinum's prowess that it can fit in the best of both worlds (stealth and balls-out action), but when you're a hard-as-nails cyborg ninja that can decimate anything, using stealth to get past enemies seems a bit of a waste when you could be exercising your action chops. Literally.

Thankfully the game is challenging, but in the way the best action games are. If you screw up, it's because you're not using what the game gives you well enough. You'll get mulched by certain bosses if you go in swinging away willy-nilly, but work out how to parry and evade and you'll be engaging in some of the best boss fights in an action game this side of *Devil May Cry 3*. The game's so responsive that should you get murdered, it'll be down to your bad timing and complete uselessness rather than any technical failings.

Though it's more than deserving of the unexpurgated love afforded to it so far, not all is perfect on the *Rising* front. In order to get everything running so smoothly, the game's taken a hit on the textures side of things. By no means is it off-putting, and in motion it's a sight to behold, but iffy textures do stand out sometimes. While the character models are good, and the smooth gameplay is clearly the most important thing, jaggies are pretty apparent on some objects and models. Some of the level environments aren't too interesting either. Fair enough, it's *Metal Gear*, so realistic (ish) environments are to be expected, and some of the later levels are suitably grand and varied, but sewer levels? They really do need to piss off. The camera has a tendency to go haywire sometimes, too. Though there's a lock-on button, the game's so quick that you can sometimes lose track of what's really going on, and before you know it there's a chainsaw tearing away at your chest. However, there's nothing here that'll have any right-minded individuals wretching in disgust, and the graphical compromises make sense when you see it move as smoothly and perfectly as it does.

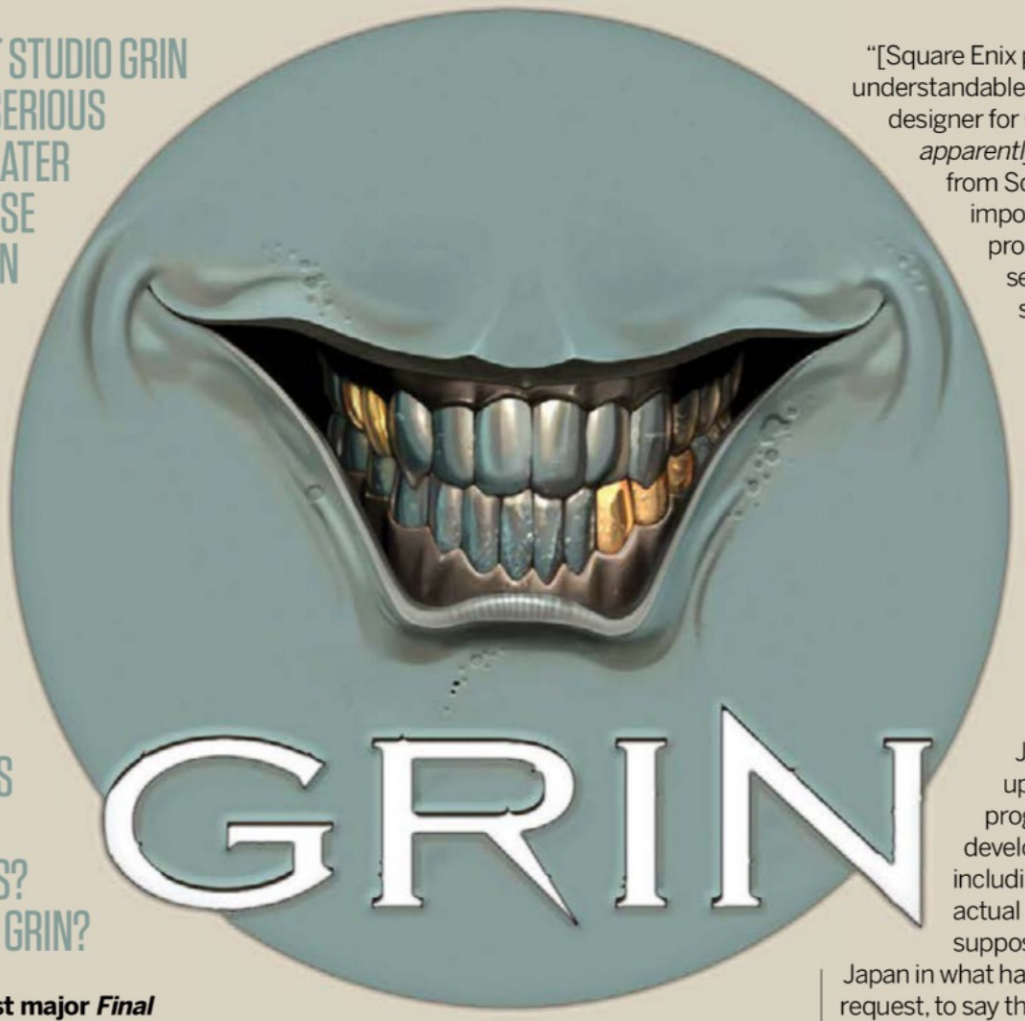
There are more combos to unlock, as well as costumes and upgrades for Raiden, so there's plenty of scope for depth and increased combat expertise (especially if there's a New Game+). It also seems a good length too (longer than *Vanquish*, at least), with the game remaining unfinished in the seven and a half hours we spent with it. Most importantly, though, it's very likely the most fun game you'll play all year. It's relentless, self-knowing and deserving of the large audience it should get with the *Metal Gear* name slapped on the front. It proves beyond all shadow of doubt that Hideo Kojima's franchise can branch off and succeed without a Snake hissing away.

Not every *Metal Gear* game has to be twisty-turny conspiracy-theorist debates about human nature; sometimes it's just fun to chop someone's legs and arms off and then run up a building in a sombrero. Such a pure, videogaming experience should be savoured in this day and age, and it could quite honestly be the *Metal Gear* game for people that don't like *Metal Gear*.

Metal Gear Rising is a startling, enthralling, stupidly entertaining game, and one strongly urges that you seize the opportunity to take your revengeance come its release day on 22 February. ⊗

FAILED FANTASY

IN 2009 THE DEVELOPMENT STUDIO GRIN WAS CLOSED BECAUSE OF SERIOUS FINANCIAL ISSUES. YEARS LATER IT WAS REVEALED THAT THESE ISSUES WERE IN PART DOWN TO A NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN, UNFINISHED AND UNRELEASED FINAL FANTASY XII SPIN-OFF KNOWN AS FORTRESS. IT WOULD'VE BEEN THE FIRST FINAL FANTASY GAME FROM A WESTERN DEVELOPER. PLAY WENT IN SEARCH OF SOME ANSWERS FROM THOSE FORMERLY AT GRIN: WHAT WAS FORTRESS? AND WOULD IT HAVE SAVED GRIN?



IT was to be the first major *Final Fantasy* title developed outside of Japan – a spin-off dubbed 'Fortress', created by the Stockholm, Sweden-based team at GRIN and something quite unlike anything we'd ever seen before in the classic RPG series.

But Square Enix backed out of the deal. Payments weren't made. Problems mounted. GRIN's external studios across the globe closed. Eventually the main Stockholm office followed. It wasn't known at the time – it would take a while for the news to come out – but one way or another, *Final Fantasy* helped kill GRIN.

As Magnus Ihrefors, 3D artist at GRIN, put it: "I only found out that [Square Enix had pulled out] in the final month or so, but of course it felt like a punch in the belly; this was our last chance to take us back on track again."

There was a lot of mud-slinging in the years that followed, with GRIN's founders Bo and Ulf Andersson laying the blame squarely, pun intended, at Square Enix's feet. The bosses claimed the Japanese publisher did not pay GRIN for any work it did on *Fortress*, that it did not want the Swedish studio to complete any project it was working on. It seems pretty straightforward if you look at it that way, but not everything is as straightforward as it seems – shades of grey do exist, and not just in terrible book form.

"[Square Enix pulling out] was a very understandable decision," Guillaume Mroz, level designer for GRIN Stockholm, said. "GRIN *apparently* wasn't following the requests from Square Enix, and this was a very important licence for the publisher, probably the most important." And it seems the games released by the studio didn't help either, as Mroz explained: "They also saw the poor results of *Bionic Commando* and the failures that *Terminator Salvation* and *Wanted* were... Square Enix realised how it really was and it backed off – which was fully understandable, especially in the difficult financial times of that period."

The famous story about GRIN's relationship with Square Enix, one that sums it up quite nicely, goes like so: the Japanese publisher wanted updates on *Final Fantasy: Fortress*'s progress, asking the Swedish developer to fax over important details, including the game's code. The game's actual development language was supposedly asked to be *faxed* over to Japan in what has to go down as a misguided request, to say the least.

But you can't blame GRIN for taking on work with a foreign publisher, as it had already had some level of success working on *Bionic Commando* for Capcom – though it wasn't plain sailing from day one. "There was certainly communication difficulties between GRIN and Capcom Japan during development of *Bionic Commando*," Jonatan Crafoord, sound designer at GRIN, told us. "It is not surprising given the vast geographic distance and the cultural differences. The game took much longer than planned and I think there were too many people involved in writing the game." But things did get better, as he explained: "Capcom USA took over much of the production duties. They put a couple of producers on the floor at the studio, and that >

GRIN ON GRIN

WHO BETTER TO ASK WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF GRIN'S PS3 OUTPUT THAN THOSE WHO WORKED ON THE GAMES?



BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

"It really *was* my baby – I loved working on it and I still love the game." - **Westin**

"This is definitely my favourite game of the ones we created at GRIN. It is coherent, well designed, has an awesome art style and a great soundtrack. It really goes to show that the culture we had at GRIN worked really well in smaller teams for making downloadable games, rather than scrambling to make huge retail titles." - **Crafoord**

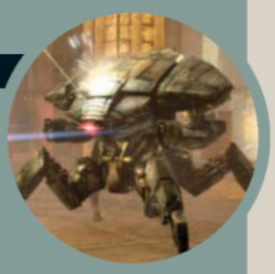


BIONIC COMMANDO

"I didn't like it so much." - **Westin**

"Production was fun and parts of the game are really enjoyable, in terms of audio, visuals as well as design. I'm not unhappy with the result, and working on it was a great experience." - **Crafoord**

"Despite the poor financial results and the average critical score, I'm very proud of that game. It was a great development and I'm very happy with the result. I think some decisions brought the game down and prevented players from fully enjoying it." - **Mroz**



TERMINATOR SALVATION

"It's very sad that we had such a licence but didn't get to make anything out of it. GRIN Gothenburg was struggling with making the game and the real development was only four months." - **Mroz**

"It was fun to work on but sadly the game lost its way somewhere during production." - **Thelander**

"A very hasty production that ended up being a very short, repetitive game." - **Ihrefors**



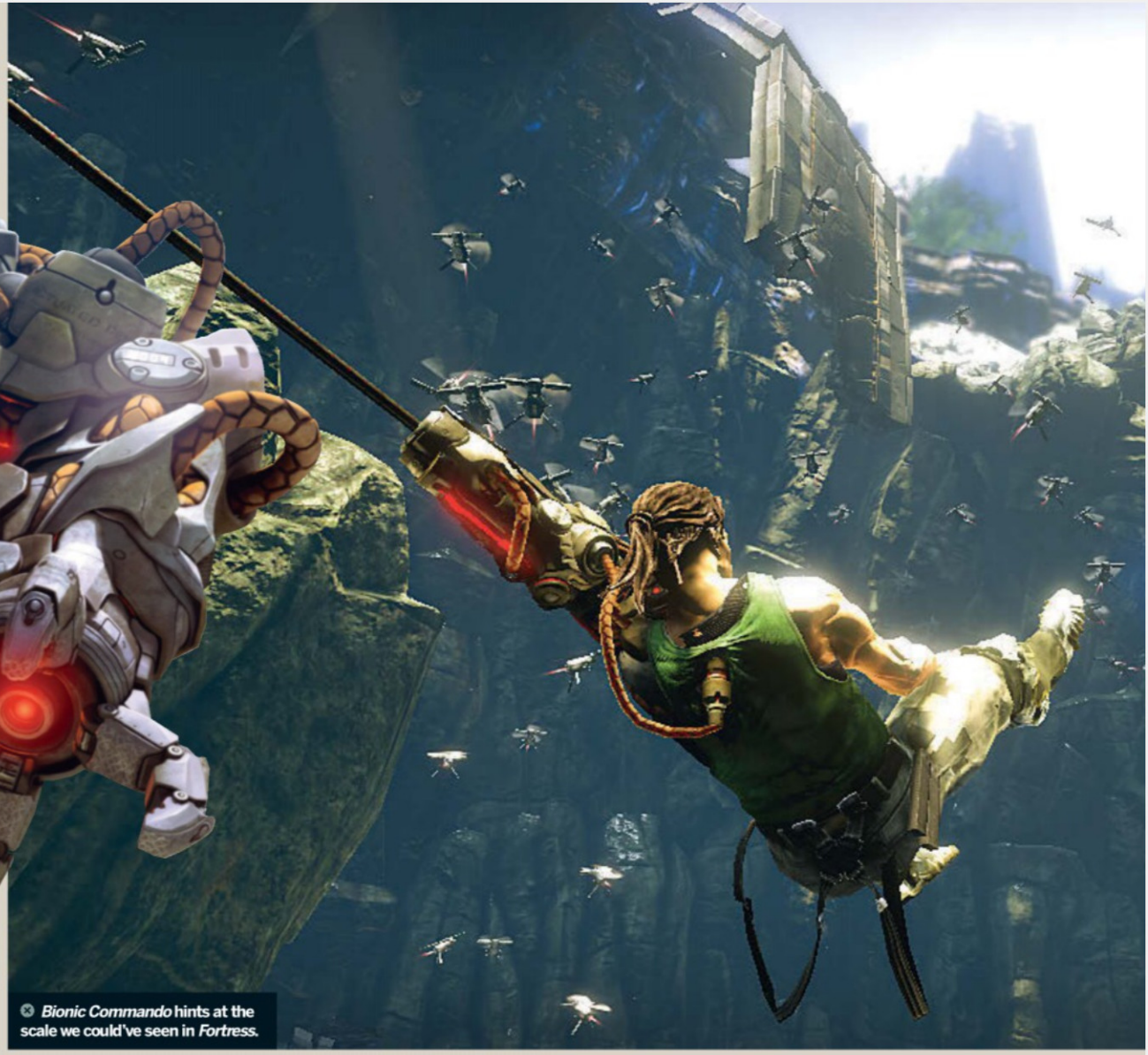
WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

"I just gave it a quick test during my time at GRIN, but the curved bullets sure gave a satisfied feeling." - **Thelander**

"I know that we had some quality issues with this game in the beginning and had to move some of the more experienced people to work on this project. This unfortunately affected other productions. This game was first created in Barcelona but later GRIN Stockholm took over." - **Wiking**

Penelo from *FFXII*. Ivalice was the setting for *Fortress*.





Bionic Commando hints at the scale we could've seen in *Fortress*.

BIONIC COMMANDON'T

THE GAME GOT A MIXED RECEPTION, BUT IT WASN'T ALWAYS GOING TO BE THE WAY IT ENDED UP

Bionic Commando's lead character Nathan Spencer hasn't exactly gone down in history as a great, and Anders Westin agreed somewhat: "I think there were – and I'm not kidding here – 300 versions of the *Bionic Commando* main character designed by my colleague. Then Capcom sent them off to be focus tested – and they picked the one with the dreadlocks, the ugliest one of them all, and they just stuck with it."

Similarly, the game proper wasn't well received everywhere, but according to Westin it was better earlier on: "I worked on the prototype for *Bionic Commando* and they should have released that – it was an amazing game. It was a harder game, but you had more control over the grappling hook; it was more fun. They had little things, like you could always pull out a piece of the environment – the ground or a wall or anything – to make a shield. That was effective and fun to play with, but they decided to take it out as it would make textures look weird. There were a lot of decisions like that, but the prototype was fun to play."

> relationship felt great. We had lots of great help finalising [the *Bionic Commando* games]."

The death of *Fortress* – even the existence of it in the first place – wasn't even known about until years after GRIN had disappeared. And as if that wasn't bad enough, when the details of the game came out it became even worse – an action-RPG set in Ivalice, set some time after the events of *Final Fantasy XII*, it would surely scratch an itch that fans of the series had. "Art-wise, this was going to look very realistic, *Skyrim*-like," according to Mroz, while Linda Dahlberg, associate producer at GRIN, explained a bit more: "It was not going to be a classic *Final Fantasy* title, but rather a story featuring some known characters set in a 'Nordic' version of the *Final Fantasy* universe – and primarily set in a massive fortress."

But the project was so secretive and subject to so many changes that many employees at GRIN didn't ever actually see it, and those that did see it weren't even aware it was a *Final Fantasy* game until around a month before GRIN closed. As Anders Westin, animator at the studio, told us: "We got to know [it was to be a *Final Fantasy* project] very late, in a very strange meeting. We had just had massive lay-offs, then the CEO took us into a room and told us 'this is what we're working on, it's *Final Fantasy*, and you're not to tell anyone – not even your f***ing wives'. It was ridiculous."

It's easy to get lost in the mix and forget, though, that GRIN was not a *Final Fantasy* studio first and foremost – it was one built on licensed foundations. Maybe not one that would have been expected to handle a spin-off of one of the most popular Japanese RPG series in existence, true. You only have to look so far as the fact *Final Fantasy: Fortress* was originally to be a game with no ties to the Square Enix franchise to see that the unfortunate events with the publisher could have been avoided altogether. But even then it might not have saved GRIN from bankruptcy and closure.

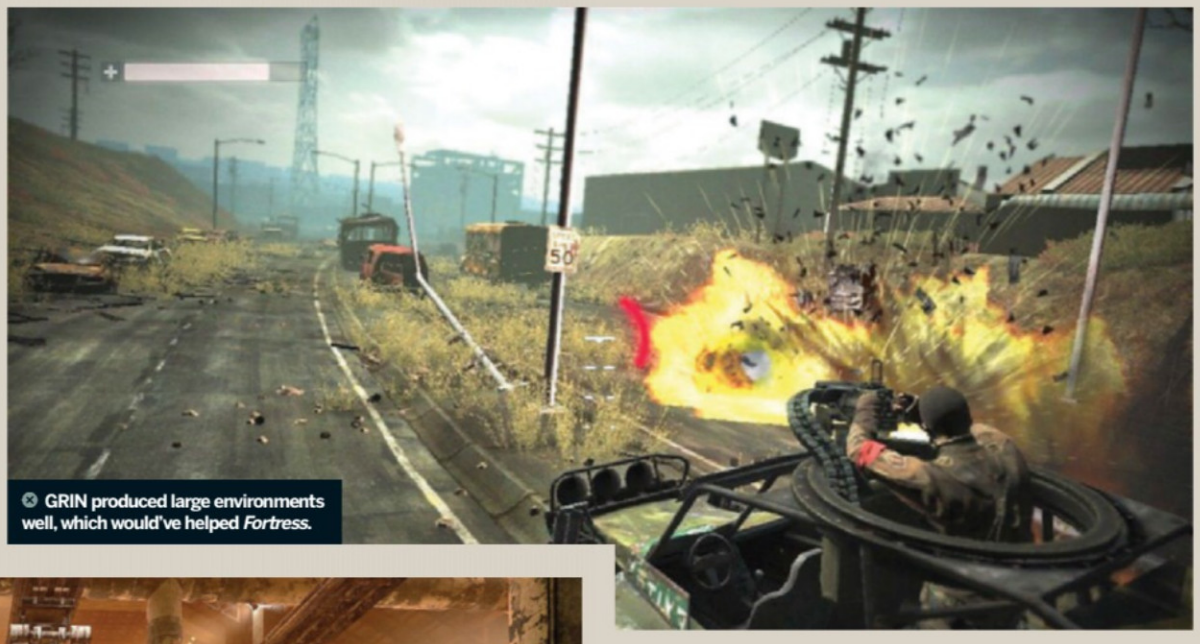
Westin found some upper management decisions confusing, others outright bewildering: "They promoted a lot of people to middle-management levels, but the big decisions they never trusted anyone to take. So there was a lot of waiting if you had changes or a question, because there was one go-to guy for 300 people and it becomes very inefficient after a while."

A lack of cohesion was a familiar sight at GRIN, it seemed: "I was barely even aware that we were expanding in Barcelona and Gothenburg," Crafoord explained. "I remember my former 'boss', then creative director, asking me to complete sound for the *Wanted* prototype by the next week, and I was all 'what, we have another studio and project in Spain?'. Needless to say the communication and structure in the company was sporadic and unguided at best. We were growing maybe 100% year on year, but there seemed to be no solid managerial plan on how to co-ordinate our efforts."

Dahlberg also pointed out the lack of plans held by management: "Unfortunately GRIN suffered greatly from growing pains, like so many other studios, and did not have a plan in place for long-term sustainability." Mattias Wiking, gameplay programmer at the studio, saw some of the issues as being created by the culture of GRIN: "When the company grew it was harder for the creative director to oversee all of the company projects, and with so much freedom for the team members it was difficult to maintain a coherent vision of the games."

Ihrefors, like the others, employed the benefit of hindsight: "The worst thing was perhaps the lack of

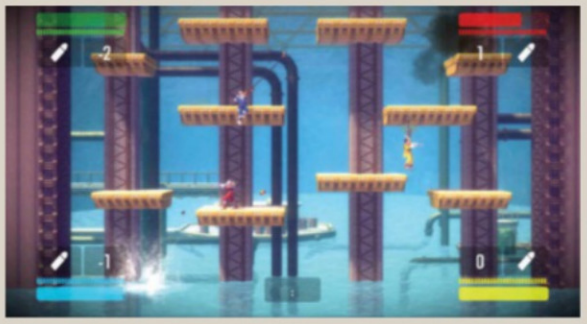




GRIN produced large environments well, which would've helped *Fortress*.



Fortress would've been less *Terminator*, more *Bionic Commando*.





someone stepping on the brake pedal – being the 'boring' guy – because it all went really fast. Too fast, as we now know."

It should be pointed out, though, that just because there was mismanagement, questionable secrecy, a lack of cohesion and ultimately everyone was left jobless, nobody that Play spoke to was resoundingly negative about the studio and its accomplishments. "It was loads of fun," Crafoord told us. "The sheer talent of the people I got to work with made it worthwhile. While there wasn't much in terms of guidance, there was also very little red tape. We had lots of personal freedom."

Mroz agreed: "We were well taken care of and there was an enjoyable family feeling there. We felt close to the owners. I can't put my finger on any bad points, really. Besides what led to the bankruptcy, this was a great place to work at, especially as a level designer."

Ihrefors added to the positive sentiment: "The good thing about GRIN was the friendly atmosphere – people were really dedicated and truly loved their jobs." Thelander introduced the rogue element of RC planes as a reason to enjoy working somewhere: "We had a fun time working on the *Terminator* game with a lot of unforgettable laughs," he told us. "We had a really nice office, big enough to fly small RC planes." Always handy, no doubt.

Dahlberg echoed thoughts we had heard elsewhere about the studio, saying: "Although GRIN was a big company, it still had a 'small studio' feel to it, and it really was jam-packed with talented people." And those talented people were given a fair bit of free reign, according to Wiking: "The best thing was the creative input that everyone was allowed to have and that people listened to each other. The hierarchy of the company was really flat and we were all working closely together."

Still, though, with all the positive feeling about the company and the work on a spin-off to one of the most popular series in the world being worked on, GRIN closed. The gaming landscape is a very different one now, with countless other studios going the same way as the Swedes and a far more limited selection of major mainstream games making their way to retail – though that's alongside a thriving indie and digital marketplace. It's a changed place, but it's an interesting one.

Westin wasn't so positive about the state of the modern mainstream, however: "I think that creatively the games industry is doomed... almost," he said. "I sort of hope that it implodes on itself - I felt that GRIN was a big studio when we were 300 people – but that's tiny today. I think that we're going to see maybe five big IPs that can be on the *Halo* scale of games. It's making it impossible to compete in that market when the production values are so high and you need a thousand people to make a game."

Final Fantasy didn't kill GRIN. It helped, of course – if funding was secured and the title released, the developer might have been able to survive, even thrive. But a combination of factors – the perfect storm of events – came together and killed the studio. It was a sad time in 2009, but since then many have risen from the ashes – the Stockholm development scene is stronger than ever, and many of those involved with GRIN have set up their own studios, working on their own (non-licensed, of course) projects.

They lived, they learned, they grew as a result – but however you look at it, however many positives you can draw from it, one thing remains: we're never going to see the inside of *Fortress* – GRIN and Square Enix's failed Fantasy.

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DmC: Devil May Cry

People didn't want this game. They were wrong


It's not quite as relentlessly difficult as it used to be, but *DmC* still packs a challenge.

PS3

If you've only been paying moderate attention to Capcom and Ninja Theory's reboot of *Devil May Cry*, you might not realise how many people are praying for it to fail. Hardcore Dante-heads who cannot cope with the concept of change are chewing up the internet's message boards and social media with the kind of vociferousness normally reserved for *Star Wars* nerds and *Twilight* fans. It's actually a little weird. So sure are these angry lot that Cambridge's Ninja Theory don't 'get' *Devil May Cry*, that they're almost impossible to reason with. And do you know what? Ninja Theory doesn't just get *Devil May Cry*. It 'gets' almost everything.

More so than Dante's hair, more so than his smirk or his coat or his ability to juggle demons with gunfire (which is, of course, in here), Ninja Theory has understood just what matters in this genre: the combat. Without the combat, there is nothing. And beyond the combat, there are no rules. In this genre, there are absolutely no rules. *Bayonetta* already proved it, and *DmC* takes it even further.

So why isn't Dante running around gothic castles? Why are there no haunting organs on the soundtrack? Because these things don't matter. *DmC* is astonishingly punk, a steamroller of ideas and audiovisual battery that revels in flipping off the establishment as often as its hero does the same to his demon opposition. It's like a Suda 51 game in that respect, except where his work often descends into parody or sub-par mechanics when making their more out-there marks, *DmC* never loses focus of that one pure statement – it's all about the fight.



DETAILS

Publisher
Capcom
Developer
Ninja Theory
Price
£49.99
Players
1
Genre
Action
Age Rating
PEGI 16
Website
www.devilmaycry.com
Twitter
@ninjatheory
Facebook
facebook.com/devilmaycry

> And do you know what? Ninja Theory doesn't just get Devil May Cry. It 'gets' almost everything

Before we go too far down this rabbit hole of superlatives and hyperbole, though, let's bring things back to the basics. This is an origin story, a retelling of the Dante myth by some of the best storytellers in gaming. The game begins during a sordid night out, where lost-soul Dante drinks his way through a night in the company of demonic strippers and thumping bass. When he awakens, a mysterious girl is at the door of his trailer, warning him of an incoming hunter demon, and before Dante has a chance to rattle off a one liner (or put on any clothes), the very world is disintegrating before his eyes.

It's about as thrilling and vital a start to a game as any in recent memory. You're thrust straight into a scrap with a band of Lesser Stygian (noob demons, basically) and let loose with Rebellion, Dante's trusty blade. Despite the drop to 30fps, despite the new hair cut and despite the change of developer, things already feel pretty good. The old combos work (although launching now has its own button). Transitions are smooth. Evades are instantaneous. Slicing and dicing feels great.

As you plough forwards (finding Ebony and Ivory on the way), that mysterious girl tells you you're stuck in Limbo. Limbo, a place where the very structure and fabric of physicality are mere playthings and the world can change on a whim. It's also a place that's set out to hurt you – it growls hate and flashes up threats on the scenery. A wry nod to the power of the author in a videogame, then, but thankfully not a running theme.


Environments don't repeat themselves as much as they did in *Devil May Cry 4*.









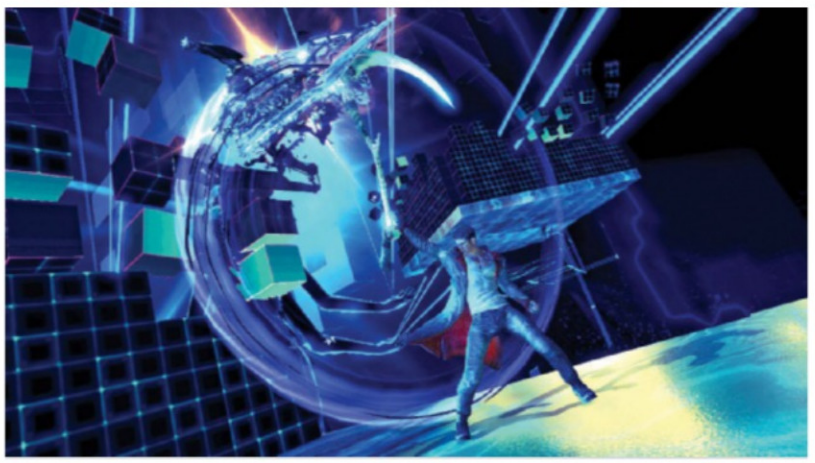


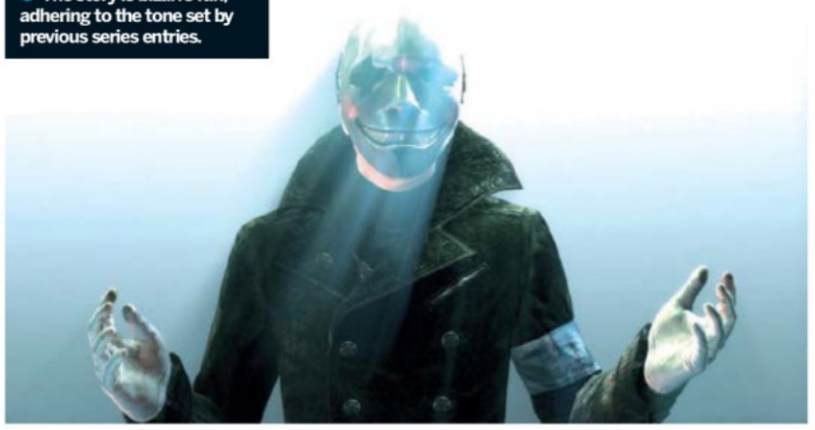
That's not a great place to store your head. Where does he keep his genitals?

Limbo is the demon world, basically – invisible to humans, and very anti-Dante since demon overlord Mundus figured out that our hero is the only remaining Nephilim (half demon, half angel) in the world and that he needs to be killed. It's also a place where Ninja Theory can have a hell of a lot of fun. Every time you think you're settled or safe, you're not. Think a corridor is just a corridor? Wait until it rips itself from its foundations and stretches to the horizon. It's one of the most arresting and extraordinarily stylistic games ever made. And it never, ever gets in the way of the combat.

As we said, nothing matters more than the combat. After you re-familiarise yourself with your guns and blade, it becomes clear just how much work Ninja Theory has put into not only maintaining the quality level of previous *Devil May Cry* fighting systems, but expanding upon them. This is truly the game Tameem Antoniades and his team were born to make. Instead of having to build a combat system that aped *Devil May Cry*, they can now take all of Capcom's knowledge and mould it to their own taste.

Within a couple more levels, you're given two new weapons, which are accessed through the left and right triggers respectively. Each side represents one of Dante's two chromosomes, angelic or demonic. The first, Arbiter, is a heavy axe, and belongs on the >





The story is bizarre fun, adhering to the tone set by previous series entries.

HOW HARD?

Worried that DmC might not be hardcore enough for you?

THE WESTERNISATION OF Dante has been a constant source of ire for the vocal internet sorts since the reboot was first announced, and while most of the anger has been aimed at the colour of the protagonist's hair, it doesn't take a Jungian PhD to work out that series fans are really worried about more substantial changes. Namely – is the new *DmC* hardcore enough?

One the normal difficulty, probably not. It's a perfectly pitched level of trickiness, actually, floating between nicely challenging but accessible enough for the average player to brawl through to the end. The game makes it clear that Nephilim (Hard) is the true *DmC* experience, though, and within a couple of levels it's just as brutal (but fair) as you could ask for. Modern day tropes like fair checkpointing and infinite continues are no bad thing, either. *DmC* is a game that wants you to get to the end.

Of course, when you do just that, you start to unlock the real challenge. Son Of Sparda is a stupendously difficult remix mode, where high-level enemies appear as early as the first battle, and it'll take phenomenal concentration to even get past the opening level. And from there, it only gets harder. Anyone who can get S ranks on Heaven And Hell mode probably isn't human.

Or you could try  **Bayonetta** Issue 187
An exemplary and absolutely insane action combat game from Platinum. **93%**



REVIEW

DANTE VS BAYONETTA. FIGHT!

The two best combat action games on PS3 duke it out

DEVIL MAY CRY	BAYONETTA
	

WINNER DMC

ROUND 1: VISUALS

Bayonetta's bright palette still feels fresh two years on, but *DmC*'s extraordinary range of environments and reforming scenery just about pip it. Amazing that Unreal 3 is this versatile. Also, the PS3 port of *Bayonetta* was a disappointment.

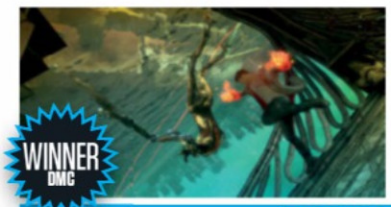




WINNER BAYONETTA

ROUND 2: COMBAT

A very close battle. *DmC*'s brawling is almost faultless, but the sheer variety of attacks in *Bayonetta*'s arsenal means the hairy witch probably just about takes this one. They're both way ahead of the competition, though.





WINNER DMC

ROUND 3: CUT-SCENES

Easy. *Bayonetta* is outrageously camp and occasionally funny, but Ninja Theory has been setting benchmarks with cinematics for a while now, and *DmC* is no different. Surprisingly witty, too





WINNER BAYONETTA

ROUND 4: BOSSES

When *DmC* does bosses, it does them well (apart from one), but *Bayonetta* has as many big guys in its first two chapters as Dante does in his whole campaign. A fairly comfortable win for the witch.





WINNER DMC

ROUND 5: SPECIAL ROUND

In the battle of the intangibles, *DmC*'s edgy. Whedon-meets-Gunn style and supreme soundtrack just edge *Bayonetta*'s utter weirdness. It's a treat to have two combat games of this quality in the world, ultimately.



This level is so utterly fantastic that we cannot wait for you all to play it.

> right, or 'demon' side. The second is called Osiris, and creates a kind of spinning whirlwind of death, and sits on the 'angel' side. These offer a huge amount of new combo potential (more on that later) but also let you yank enemies toward you (devil) or yank yourself towards enemies (angel). This becomes a fundamental part of the combat.

As a quick example, you can knock an enemy away with a heavy blow, then quickly yank him back towards you to carry on your combo. Likewise, you might launch a foe skywards and fire your Angel Lift, as it's called, upwards, and join him in the air. As you get to grips with the supremely malleable system, you'll learn to control the battlefield with more precision and deliberation than even *Devil May Cry 3*.

On harder difficulty levels, you'll see which enemies need to be taken out first (normally aerial buggers who like to fire projectiles at you), so you might yank them down to earth to hurl them into the melee, or soar skywards to clean them out, hopping between them using Angel Lift, before driving your weapons down to the niggling nasties below.

Get further still in the story, and you'll unlock a further two melee weapons (one for each side), and two more guns. It would be a shame to spoil the surprise and sheer joy of experimenting with each new weapon and the combo potential it brings, but suffice to say that each new addition to your arsenal just adds layers and layers to the action. By the back end of the game you're actually overwhelmed by how much power you wield, picking and choosing between attacks just for the hell of it.

Beautifully, though, on the harder difficulties – the post-completion unlock Son Of Sparda mode specifically – every single part of your



Every enemy is introduced with its own little calling card, so you know what to call them when you kill them to death.

rather sizeable weapons loadout is crucial. There may be enemies who can only be eliminated using devil or angel attacks, for example, or shielded flying dudes who must have their armour pulled away from them before being eliminated.

Anyone questioning the hardcore credentials of *DmC*'s combat, just listen to this. There are four – yes, four – ways of evading attacks. A standard roll, a demon roll which activates a *God Of War*-style slow-motion filter and gives Dante increased power for a second, an angel evade which increases his speed, and, finally, parrying. Unlike most games of this type, though, parrying takes balls, as it is activated by swinging your sword at exactly the right time to counter an enemy strike. When it works, though, you feel like the single coolest human on earth. Or should that be demon in Limbo?

Every weapon can be extensively upgraded using in-game Divinity Statues (shops, basically). Enemies defecate orbs when they die, and you trade in white souls for upgrade

In this series



Devil May Cry 3 Issue 127
Dante's finest adventure, but not one for the faint hearted or impatient. **92%**








This will surely be one of the great boss fights of 2013.



Two scenes stick out as some of the most breathtakingly original anywhere

points, and red souls for items. There are no skill trees, though, and it's possible to get Dante almost completely specced out by the end of one playthrough.

A key component of the combat in *DmC* – as always – is style. You're awarded a rank, ranging from D to SSS (who decided that S was better than A, anyway?), and it ascends as you off more enemies in increasingly awesome ways. This system has changed a touch, though, since the olden days, and it's sure to annoy some of the hardest of hardcore fans. It's much easier to get up into the S ranks than in the older games, and staying there is more of a case of not getting hit rather than constantly mixing up moves. *DmC* wants you to eliminate everyone without them even laying a finger (or gnarled demonic hoof) on you.

To maximise your ranking after each of the game's 20 missions, though, you'll need to do more than just smash monsters in their stupid faces. It's always been a bit of a *Devil May Cry* staple that Dante has to walk around the levels looking for random crap, and there are plenty of alternative routes in *DmC* in which to find lost souls (poor buggers trapped in walls) to kill, secret keys that unlock even more secret doors, and a few other power-ups.

In the old games, these sections were long, drawn-out and boring. Puzzles hung over from the survival horror games of old, and even in the most modern *Devil May Cry*, number 4, the game relied on huge and tedious amounts of backtracking. *DmC* often breaks up the action too, but there's only one puzzle in the entire game, and the rest of the time is spent in simple but stylish world traversal.

Using your push and pull mechanics, you thrust Dante through the sky, grappling onto clearly signaled points and pinging him about like a sexy emo pachinko ball. It's rarely taxing, but the basic platforming does require a >



The themes are heavy handed, but at least it's a game about something.


Enemies are easily as creative as their Capcom-made forebears.

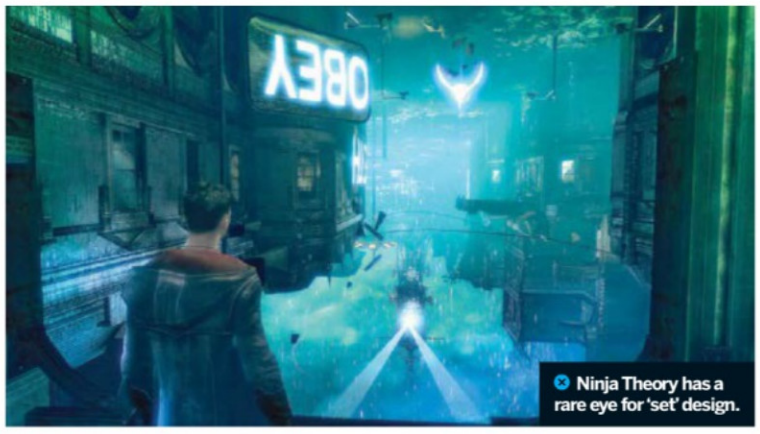


You can see why people don't like him, but he's actually all right.

facebook
Did *Devil May Cry* need a reboot? Tell us at facebook.com/PlayMagUK

> level of dexterity and concentration that elevates it above most. Why walk when you can fly? The environments you move through are always so breathtaking and surreal that it rarely feels like busywork, and once again as you progress, the game consistently adds layers to the action. By the end, you're traversing some very tricky terrain using all manner of button combinations. And if you mess up? A quick restart and a small drop in health, *Zelda* style.

It's never long before you're back in combat though, and even if the raw input is the same, *DmC* never fails to shock or surprise. Remember when we said it's all about the combat? Well, it certainly is, but it's also about so much more. Every single moment is accentuated and improved by the outstanding musical score, provided by Dutch drum-and-bassers Noisia and Atlantan death metallers Combichrist. It's rare, especially these days, for in-game music to genuinely enhance gameplay, but that's exactly what *DmC*'s soundtrack does.



Ninja Theory has a rare eye for 'set' design.

A brief cut-scene usually pre-empts each skirmish, and the opening bars of a song will play along too. The split second the cut-scene ends (blending seamlessly into the action) the bass will drop and you're confronted by a wall of noise that gets the head bobbing and the heart thumping as you rhythmically smash through the enemy hordes. It's amazing, truly. Another string to *DmC*'s multi-faceted bow.

Everything's so damn stylish. Dante himself, who first appears like a bit of a prick, quickly turns into a likeable prick. Think Andrew Garfield in the new *Spider-Man* movie – wise-cracking, capable, but a little daft. Yes, it gets a bit *Vampire Diaries* at times when you're trying to outsmoulder your brother Vergil, but the quality of the performance capture and the Alex Garland-supervised script makes it easy to forgive. It doesn't feel like your typical cut-scene-then-game jarring juxtaposition either. Everything flows together smoothly; it all feels part of the same experience. No one does that sort of thing better than Ninja Theory.

The game's actually about things, too. Stuff. Real life stuff. No one's going to compare it to a Paul Thomas Anderson movie (like *There Will Be Blood*), but there's clear allegory to the concepts of media brainwashing and even the Arab Spring in *DmC*. Heavy-handed allegory, maybe, but it's still delivered fairly evenly and stylishly. More importantly, though, it lets the creators go nuts with the aesthetics once again.

Two scenes stick out as some of the most breathtakingly original anywhere. A battle with an evil newsreader is infinitely more exciting than it sounds, and as for the mission set in a nightclub – if there's a better level in 2013, we cannot wait to play it. And, of course, both of these stunners are scored with pounding, furious beats. If you're not playing *DmC* very loud, you're quite simply doing it wrong.

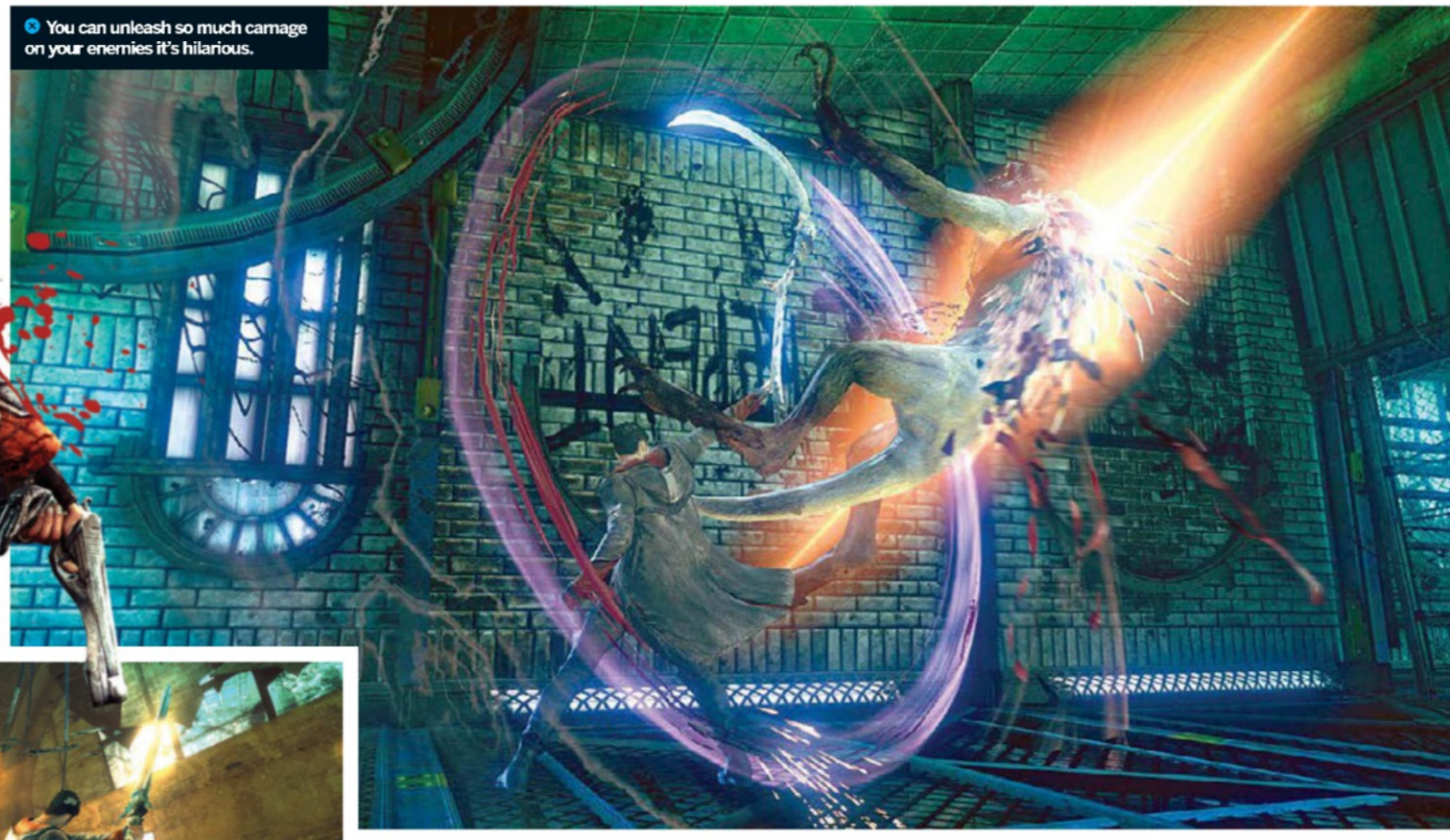
> It's about as thrilling and vital a start to a game as any in recent memory

Sometimes when a game has made this much of an impression, it almost feels a little weak to pick holes in it, but that's our job. DmC for all of its astonishing accomplishments isn't perfect. The back stretch does dip in quality, as is so often the case, although this isn't a downward slide like *Enslaved*'s, merely a very short and inoffensive couple of missions that aren't quite as thrilling as those that preceded them. They culminate in a boss battle that doesn't live up to its billing, too, although the finale itself is saved by a very cool scrap.

Talking of bosses, those who have been brought up on the relentless boss rush of prior *Devil May Cry*s might be a little disappointed. By our count, there are six big boys to battle with throughout the game, and they range from the utterly superb to the merely competent, but there's nothing quite as mechanically satisfying as the ice Cerberus from *Devil May Cry 3*. Thankfully, there's also nothing anywhere as painfully awful as the ninety-five-stage helicopter battle from *Devil May Cry 2*.

A small controller-based niggle, too. The analogue triggers aren't ideal for the rapid fire switching between weapons, and you'll





You can unleash so much carnage on your enemies it's hilarious.





There's never been any doubt that Ninja Theory makes beautiful games.

ONLINE MODE RATED

Think you're cool? You're not

THERE'S NO TRADITIONAL online mode in *DmC*, but that doesn't stop it being a compelling multiplayer game. Every level's final score can be uploaded to a leaderboard, meaning your friends can battle to beat you, and the enemy, in ever more stylish ways. Each of the quickfire secret missions also has a leaderboard, so there's constant opportunities to better your idiot friends. Old *DMC* games were about bettering yourself – and that's still a huge part of it – but beating everyone else while you do it is just a tasty dessert at the end of a sumptuous meal. ★★★★★

often get caught busting out the wrong move at inopportune moments. It's not something that'll cause too much bother on normal difficulty, but when Son Of Sparda is demanding split-second timing, being let down by your controller is the stuff of nightmares, like the day Dante ran out of V05 ultra style.

You can reconfigure the buttons, which does help, and after a while you start to map the timings into your muscle memory anyway, but it's a tiny issue that'll prove fuel for the fanboy fire. And, unfortunately, they don't need much.

Bullheaded resistance to change is a real issue in videogaming, and Ninja Theory has had an uphill battle on its hands ever since that first CG *DmC* trailer hit. Instead of letting the negativity define the project, though, Antoniades and his team, along with Capcom Japan, have forged forward and built a combat action game of rare and almost unmatched quality. That it's even in the same argument as its predecessors and *Bayonetta* is a triumph on its own. The fact it could surpass them (and comfortably does for three of the four *Devil May Cry* games) is something no one could have imagined.

It'll take multiple replays and plenty of time before the true hardcore value of *DmC* is revealed, but it's so easy to praise even now. This is the game Ninja Theory has always had in it, the game that proves this genre is absolutely still relevant, and quite possibly the best late Christmas present in history. *DmC*. It just gets it.

Jon Denton

VERDICT

A staggering achievement from Ninja Theory. *DmC* injects new life into one of the best genres in all of gaming, and does so with a style and confidence that elevates it beyond its roots. Awesome, truly.

93%



Dante steps into the world of a Nineties dance music video.



In this series



Devil May Cry HD Collection Issue 217
Get all the original *Devil May Cry* games in one poorly transferred HD package. **80%**



RELEASE DATE: 25 JANUARY

Ni No Kuni: Wrath Of The White Witch

It might be PS3's prettiest game, but is this long-awaited role-player as good as it looks?



DETAILS

Publisher
Namco Bandai
Developer
Level-5
Price
£39.99
Players
1
Genre
RPG
Age Rating
PEGI 12
Website
www.ni-nokunigame.com
Twitter
@LEVEL5_IA
Facebook
www.facebook.com/ninokunigame

PS3

Around 12 hours into *Ni No Kuni* you'll encounter a genie who teaches you about alchemy, the art of mixing familiar ingredients to create something new. It's a fitting metaphor for the game itself, which takes its cues from a number of other RPGs, while adding just a pinch of its own unique flavour. It's an expertly measured recipe that will leave you satisfyingly nourished, even if it's the presentation rather than the taste that you'll remember most.

In other words, don't be surprised if it takes you places you've been to before. Once you've passed through a gateway into this fantastical land, you begin by exploring a forest, before moving onto a desert, then a volcanic area. It's no surprise that water and ice regions are involved later on. Yet it's so vividly realised it's hard to complain. This collaboration with Studio Ghibli sees the Japanese animation house at its whimsical finest, populating the world with weird and wonderful creatures. Ghibli's art shouldn't work quite this well in 3D but it's one of the best translations of a flat art style we've ever seen, even if the traditional 2D anime cutscenes are the highlights.

The beauty of the imagery carries *Ni No Kuni* a long way. The field map is gorgeous, clouds casting gentle shadows over undulating sands as your party jogs towards a lush oasis tucked away between the dunes. Good job, too, as you'll spend a lot of time there, traipsing back and forth to fulfil your questing duties. The sheer size of the world conveys scale and distance in a way that's crucial for the sensation of an epic journey, but it undeniably gets repetitive over time.

As too does backtracking through dungeons when you get there. There are several wrong turns and multiple pathways; a guiding star shows you where to head next but it's always tempting to explore the unknown because the unknown is frequently so good to look at. Those thick outlines turn fuzzy in the rippling heat haze from flowing lava streams while an early forest area is dappled in autumnal shades, as protagonist Oliver nimbly hops up mushroom steps to higher platforms.

If it looks pretty spectacular, it sounds even better. Long-time Ghibli collaborator Joe Hisaishi is the man behind the sweeping score that switches from strident to melancholy and back without a single misstep. There's a lovely, wistful theme that soundtracks Oliver's return visits to his own world, specifically the place he calls home: a slice of apple-pie Americana named Motorville. It's a delicate, moving piece that pricks at your tear ducts well before Level-5 gives you anything to really cry about. Then, when things get emotional, Hisaishi layers on the strings in a way that makes your lip tremble without ever feeling as manipulative as it might have in the hands of a less-skilled composer. The best music can tell a story all by itself, and Hisaishi is one of the finest yarn-spinners around. On occasion, you'll even find yourself releasing your thumb from the analogue stick just so you can pause for a moment to simply listen.

Of course, you won't always get the opportunity to. For this is a role-playing game, and the rules of the genre mean that your trek through this magical dreamland will be regularly punctuated by enemies. These aren't random encounters, per se – you'll see creatures roaming the wilds or patrolling pathways in the game's 'dungeon' segments, but while ostensibly you have a choice whether or not to engage them, most of the time they're difficult to avoid.

Thankfully, combat's lively and entertaining, eschewing menu-based blow-trading in favour of a system that acts as a hodgepodge of several JRPGs. It plays out in pseudo-real-time, as you run around an enclosed space, selecting your moves on the fly, with all but the most basic moves subject to a cooldown period and the number of MP you have left. At first you simply have Oliver to worry about, but then he gains the ability to control familiars, monsters that fight on his behalf in a manner akin to *Dragon Quest* and its many peers. They in turn are governed by a rock-paper-scissors elemental mandate and their own individual time limits that prevent you relying on a single powerful ally. You can feed them treats to improve various stats – chocolate boosts attack power, while ice cream (rather counterintuitively) increases their evasiveness



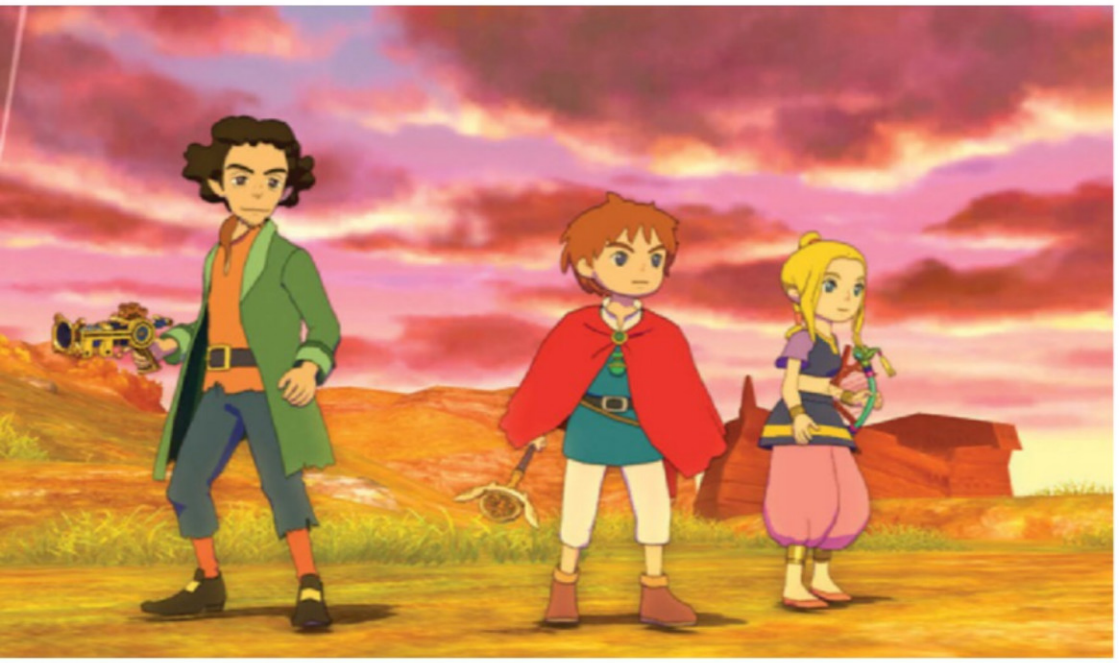


Should you die, you're given the opportunity to continue at your current level, at the cost of a small percentage of your total cash.

www.imagineshop.co.uk



Each character has an affinity with certain familiar types that can increase their combat effectiveness.



– and collectable orbs can evolve them into more powerful forms.

You'll soon have partner characters to worry about, too. You can opt to switch control of any member of your party at any time during battle, and set tactics for your AI-controlled ally when you've got your hands full. They mostly handle themselves pretty well, but during boss fights they may struggle without close attention. We found ourselves swapping more often than we felt comfortable with, because of healer pal Esther's steadfast refusal to defend herself. Standing directly in the line of fire while lobbing a few HP to perk up your injured imp may be noble, but it's a one-way trip to Dead City.

Still, for the most part it's an entertaining plate-spinning act. It isn't simply a case of keeping your own character alive, as you and your familiars share a single health bar, so if they die, you do. Your partner can fall during battle, but if Oliver collapses it's game over. So you'll run away from localized attacks or dash to collect the health or magic drops that spill out to replenish your meters, evade or defend to reduce the damage from direct assaults, and shift your thumb from analogue stick to D-pad to switch characters or targets. All these elements coalesce into a system that's surprisingly tactical and requires constant alertness. Venture into a new area and you may be shocked at how quickly that health bar will deplete from just a few blows.

That said, once you hit your rhythm, it gets much easier, and eventually you'll reach a stage where you're walking through the field and instead of approaching, enemies will turn tail and flee. That leaves the main challenge to the guardians of the world, and here the difficulty level occasionally spikes a little too sharply. It's not uncommon to breeze your way through a dungeon with barely a >

twitter
Will you play *Ni No Kuni*? Tell us at twitter.com/PlayMag_UK



The battle screen can look a little busy, but it's surprisingly readable, even if it's easy to get in a muddle with controls when you're in a pinch.



Simple AI routines bring settlements to life. It's not quite as stiff or static as JRPGs can be.



Swaine is the archetypal loveable rogue, and unusually is introduced well before he joins your team.

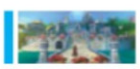
SIR MIX-A-LOT

Better living through alchemy

Once you've beaten Al-Khemi, he'll join you from within his magical cauldron, giving you the opportunity to mix items together to create something newer and better. It isn't just a case of throwing in food: you can combine two swords for a more powerful blade, for example. You can obtain recipes by completing tasks and speaking to NPCs, or simply combine ingredients and hope for the best. Thankfully, you're not punished for experimenting: any items that don't blend remain in your inventory, even after Al-Khemi has emerged with a blackened face and hands from the explosively disastrous results.



Or you could try



Eternal Sonata Issue 176
Another whimsical role-player with a dynamic battle system, and a distinctive art style. It explores similar themes to *Ni No Kuni* with an equally delicate touch... **87%**



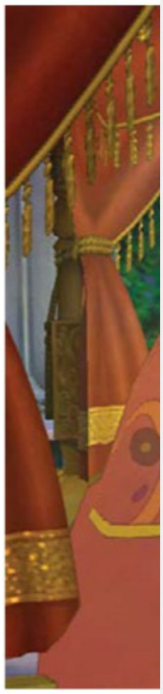




Bosses telegraph their most powerful attacks, giving you a chance to prepare to take evasive or defensive action.











> scratch only to die within a minute of encountering these behemoths. A steep challenge isn't a problem in and of itself, but it can seem unfair when erratic AI performance lets you down. Their tendency to overuse magic can leave them short of options after an early blitz, and so you'll find the guilders you earn are often spent stocking up on MP-boosting items in the towns.

And there's plenty more to keep you occupied while you're there. Asides are mostly of the fetch-quest variety, usually offering a fresh monster face to bash on the way to keep things interesting. Some are simple to the point of banality – characters lacking in kindness, courage or enthusiasm can be sorted out with a spell that removes a little of these traits from anyone with a surfeit of them. The dialogue works hard to add meaningful context, but these are the most basic of tasks, not helped by the fact that fairy assistant Drippy often spells out the solution. It's magic in name, but not in nature: you merely select a spell from a menu that you've been given patronisingly transparent hints for.

So disarmingly sweet-natured it could crack the blackened husk us cynics call a heart

Puzzles elsewhere can suffer from the same kind of hand-holding: it's clear Level-5 wants everyone to see the whole story, but answers are often simple enough without the accompanying nods and winks. This only makes the rare thoughtful moments stand out all the more, like an early series of wizarding trials produces a few puzzles and a test of twin-stick dexterity, a welcome change of pace that doesn't come around often enough. It's a JRPG that lacks a bit of the courage it often asks you to source to help others, too stuck in its ways to follow its own lead.

The story, too, threatens to get mired, this time in treacly sentimentality, a couple of early moments leaving a slightly saccharine

Previously... in Play



Issue 225
"It takes about an hour to get into *Ni No Kuni* - if you have a problem with that, just be quiet and go elsewhere." Damn right!







Turning a milk fountain into a giant block of cheese to feed a ravenous royal sounds fun, but you're handed the solution on a silver platter.



Occasionally a dungeon will throw up a surprise. Here you'll need to carefully sidle past cracks that shoot out hot steam.



When you metamorphose a familiar, they start back at Level 1.



aftertaste. It's predictable, too, though knowing where the narrative is headed doesn't make its ultimate destination any less affecting. It's a game that wears its heart proudly on its sleeve, and so disarmingly sweet-natured that it could crack the blackened husk us critics call a heart. It's never as dark as Ghibli's best, but moments of mawkishness are commonly punctured by Drippy larking around. A touching family reunion, for example, sees him gad about in the background wearing a ladies hat.

Indeed, Drippy regularly steals the show. Offering welcome levity when things threaten to get too serious, he's the strongest factor in one of the best localization efforts you're likely to see. This isn't a mere translation, but a subtle reworking of the original text that sees your ally transformed into a rambunctious Welshman. He's childish, spiky, occasionally rude and most importantly very funny indeed, fond of proclamations like "knickers!" when things are looking bad and "tidy!" when all is well. If Oliver and friends seem a little bland by comparison, the supporting cast more than compensates. There's some expert punnery, too: your genie helper is called Al-Khemi, while a mammalian familiar is named Thumbelemur.

This wordplay helps enliven an RPG that occasionally struggles to find its own voice, but speaks up boldly when it does. Its simple systems aren't particularly dazzling, but the desire to see what beautiful new location awaits you is a powerful driving force. Sure, you know roughly what to expect when you get there – random battles to level followed by a boss – but this is a rhythm that proves hard to resist. Now there's alchemy for you.

Chris Schilling

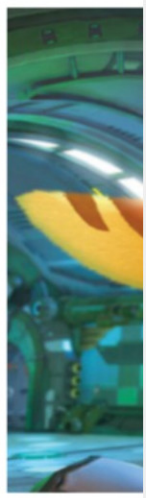
VERDICT

Eye-caressingly beautiful, and with a score that could tug heartstrings at ten paces, *Ni No Kuni* is a stirring if overly familiar RPG that takes you on a memorable journey to a world that is wonderful in every sense.

85%



You'll end up doing a lot of the dirty work yourself, especially when it comes to the bigger killing machines.





RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ratchet & Clank: Q-Force

Introducing Ratchet's day job

PS3 The *Ratchet & Clank* series is on dodgy ground nowadays. The market says multiplayer, but the fans say nostalgia, and Insomniac Games is stuck in the middle desperately trying to get the two to coexist. *Ratchet & Clank: Q-Force* is the latest unexpected offspring of this fragile union, a budget title that tries to blend tower defence into the *Ratchet & Clank* universe. But does the hat fit? Unfortunately, it looks like Insomniac has made a fashion faux-pas. And while some might be impressed at Q-Force's ability to wear this tower-shaped chapeau without falling over, others will walk on by with only a curious but cursory glance and hope that it's just a passing phase.

A few key features make the traditional *Ratchet & Clank* games so great: the story and humour, the locations and exploration, and the guns. But these are also the aspects where *Q-Force* stumbles. It's a short game, but even so the plot is embarrassingly thin, and the 'nerdy fan as villain' trope is getting old (see: *The Incredibles*). More time spent on concocting a more complex tale could have made the tower defence elements seem more relevant; as it is, the story is conveyed in little more than a sentence from the villain designed to shoehorn them in.

Your task is to recover three planets that have been taken over by this super-nerd's troops, and those worlds plus the ship that acts as a hub make up the extent of the game's locations. You don't get to fly between planets in your spaceship like you did in some of the duo's previous PlayStation 3 outings, and once you're down on the surface you're restricted to a relatively small area. Worse, you'll spend a lot of time looking at the same scenery – characteristically pretty though it is – as you trek back and forth between your tower-defended base and your current goal, be that the scattered boxes of bolts with which to pay for those towers, or the centres you need to liberate from the enemy's control.

> The plot is embarrassingly thin, and the 'nerdy fan as villain' trope is getting old

The fact that these transitional moments feel like a more standard *Ratchet & Clank* game might actually make things worse, since they're regularly interrupted. Just as you've reached the area at the end of a stretch of platforms and found a nice big pile of boxes of bolts, a warning will sound and you'll have to abandon this familiar exploration and zip on back to defend your energy beacons. The inclusion of hoverboots is a blessing, but still these frequent return trips are a pain.

And don't think you can just rely on the variety of towers, mines, and barriers you've been scrimping and saving for, as even the most expensive kinds are all-too-easily destroyed. Every warning means multiple waves of attackers, so the best you can hope for is for your defences to hold off the first while you make your way back to defend the beacons yourself. This action is also a little closer to the roots of the series, with just Ratchet (and/or Clank/Qwark) and a few over-the-top weapons against hordes of strange-looking aliens. But repeatedly going through that cycle – scouting for bolts, buying the few defences you'll be able to afford, having those defences destroyed, dispatching the aliens who destroyed them, and heading out again – quickly starts to feel pointless.





DETAILS

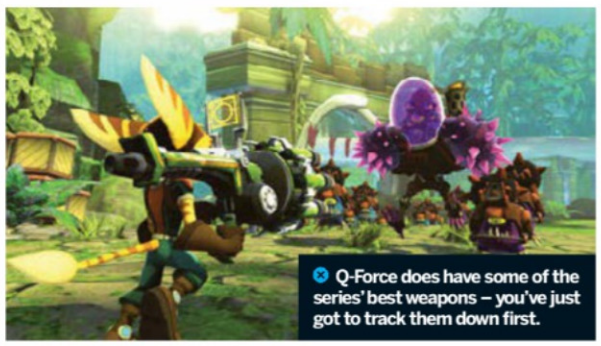
Publisher Sony
Developer Insomniac Games
Price £14.99
Players 1-2
Genre Action/Adventure
Age Rating PEGI 7
Website www.insomniac-games.com
Twitter @insomniacgames
Facebook en-gb.facebook.com/insomniacgames

Or you could try  **PixelJunk Monsters** Issue 163
For a tower defence game with towers that actually defend. **94%**





Don't waste time standing around at your base like this – you need to be out there gathering bolts.



Q-Force does have some of the series' best weapons – you've just got to track them down first.





You may never be able to afford this many turrets.

ONLINE MODE RATED

Competition beats co-operation in this one

***Q-FORCE*'S CAMPAIGN CAN** be played through with a friend online, but there's far more fun to be had with the competitive side of things. With the genuine, non-arbitrary challenge that comes from playing against another human being, this multiplayer mode is the big sister whose outfit the campaign copied but couldn't quite pull off. Here, you'll need to think rather than just carry out the same motions over and over, as you race to capture resource-giving nodes before your competitor and try to allocate those resources wisely. It might not appeal to everybody, but for those who bought *Q-Force* only to be disappointed with the campaign, this might be its saving grace. ★★★★★

Weapons aren't immediately available, either, but have to be found throughout the level. This requires a bit of fun platforming, but you need those weapons to defend your base when your towers won't do the job. And every time you start a new level, you're back to square one with your OmniWrench and a solitary weapon pod in your base. This makes sense in the competitive multiplayer, ensuring that each player starts off with nothing and has to fight it out to get armed, but feels like an arbitrary limitation in single-player.

Rather than lengthy platforming sections, intriguing puzzles, or challenging boss fights, your only real obstacle in this game is the time it'll take you to wearily traipse around each of the four/five (depending on how you count them) levels doing things like collecting up the guns you need before you can get started on what you came to the planet to do.

The whole process is easier in co-op, but playing in split-screen has a shocking effect on the resolution and you may find it difficult to convince a friend to join you in the first place. And it still all feels more like a chore than a game. If you don't enjoy the stereotypical jokes made on the villain's behalf, then you won't find much alleviating humour either, aside from moments like a tank dancing to a Groovitron or the occasional tired quip from Ratchet. The toing and froing, the lack of humour, the unconvincing boss... it all lends itself to the feeling that this is less of an adventure for our heroes than it is a tiring and repetitive day job.

Jordan Erica Webber

VERDICT

***Q-Force* only has a few levels, but the game still manages to become repetitive. Insomniac might have tried to stretch things out to make this budget title seem like value for money, but it just ends up feeling like a slog.**

52%

When faced with a tank like this, you should throw down a Groovitron and watch it dance.









Gandalf is always amusing in Lego form.

The Two Towers successfully changes up the pace of the game.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Lego The Lord Of The Rings

And not one Legolas joke



DETAILS

Publisher
Warner Interactive
Developer
Traveler's Tales
Price
£49.99
Players
1-2
Genre
Platform
Age Rating
7+
Website
thelordoftherings.lego.com/en-us/videogame
Twitter
@legolotruk
Facebook
LEGOTheLordoftheRingsVideogame

PS3

We should be bored of this by now. After seven years of constant releases and some patchy titles (the *Harry Potter*s, *Lego Indy 2* and the first *Lego Batman*), *Lego The Lord Of The Rings* is the strongest *Lego* game yet.

By using the actual voices and music from the three films, *Lego LOTR* feels like a more valid piece of merchandise than previous titles, and since the cut-scenes follow the arc faithfully, you're getting a well-honed re-creation of the Peter Jackson films alongside the usual *Lego* game novelty of seeing the characters faff about. This is probably the strongest use of a licence in a *Lego* title yet, and that nostalgia factor plays extra well with the addition of voiceovers. For the generation of people who saw these films when they were growing up, *LOTR* is similar to *Star Wars* in the cultural impact it had – if these stories mean a lot to you, Traveler's Tales honours that to the best of its abilities.

Gameplay-wise, it's not exactly a revolution of the formula, but the level design has a greater sense of consistency than past titles, which tended to wallow in poor tutorial levels before the fun stuff actually kicked in (*Lego Batman 2* was certainly guilty of this). Here, aided by the non-stop structure of the trilogy, it kicks off with the gigantic prelude battle on Mount Doom and maintains that pace throughout, and thanks to more experimental level design it manages to provoke the player in different ways – some levels are a little bit scary, believe it or not, and they're great pace-breakers between the puzzle sections.

Yet the scale of certain set pieces is what sets it apart from prior Lego titles. When it kicks off in the larger battles from *The Two Towers* and *Return Of The King*, *Lego LOTR* actually looks phenomenal, successfully relaying the scale of the movies without feeling like it's cutting corners.

Lego LOTR manages to avoid the level design quagmires and boring hours of grinding that came with previous entries, and the addition of open-world hubs enhances this interpretation of Middle-Earth.

Traveler's Tales has silently evolved the formula of these games over the years – this is as ambitious as any PlayStation 3 title released in the past 12 months, and that's a sure sign of progress.

Samuel Roberts

VERDICT

The best *Lego* game yet, against the odds. *The Lord Of The Rings* translates beautifully to *Lego*, with the strongest production values in the series to date – somehow this template still feels far from stale.

85%

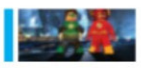


More of a bracelet than a ring, really, isn't it? We're being pedantic.



We never liked Gollum anyway,

In this series



Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes Issue 221
With an open world to explore, this is the most ambitious Lego game in the series. **80%**

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RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Virtue's Last Reward

You'll never trust anybody ever again

VITA *Virtue's Last Reward* is one of the most inventive and immersive games we've played on Vita since its launch. It's also going to be one of the system's most polarising titles, due to its unique (for the Vita, at least) setup. We urge you to try it out, as to miss it is to miss out on one of the most unique experiences to be found on Sony's handheld.

Although *Virtue's Last Reward* is a direct sequel to surprise DS hit *999: Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors*, knowledge of the original isn't required. There are enough story threads and background notes to fill you in over the 30-hour running time, which means you can simply immerse yourself in one of the most intense, harrowing novels to appear on the Vita's screen.

That's right, we said novel. *Virtue's Last Reward* is a visual novel with as much text as a small book. Worry not, though, because it's filled with nine memorable characters and a twisting and turning storyline that puts many similar games to shame. In fact, the nearest comparison we can think of is *Catherine* (albeit with far better gameplay), which should help you decide if this is the game for you.

Like *Catherine*, *Virtue's Last Reward* is split into two distinct sections: one which focuses on the clever and (for the most part) mature story and narrative, while the other covers gameplay. *Virtue's Last Reward* has 16 'Escape' scenarios which effectively see you exploring your environment, searching for clues and finding a way to escape each cleverly constructed room. Tap on an item that catches your fancy and you zoom in for a better look. Swiping down zooms you back out, while swiping left and right lets you examine your surroundings. You can also navigate via the analogue nub, but we found the touch controls to be surprisingly effective.

Things are made easier by a handy memo option that enables you to write down clues and potential puzzle solutions, while more significant clues and passwords are filed away and accessible with a touch of the screen.

These Escape sections contain some wonderfully fiendish puzzles that cover a wide range of different styles. Some are simply sliding puzzles, others require you to solve various riddles or put together others, while fiendish number puzzles are also included. There is an Easy option that makes things far simpler for those who just want to get stuck into *Virtue's Last Reward*'s story, but choosing this option does mean you won't get to see all of the game's many endings, some of which are tucked away.

While the Escapes are highly entertaining to solve, it's the clever sci-fi-tinged story that will really capture your attention, as there's nothing else quite like it on Sony's portable console.

You play a college student called Sigma who wakes up in a room with a mysterious girl called Phi, who appears to know who you are. You soon discover that seven other people have also been abducted and meet Zero III, an AI talking rabbit – no, really – who tells you that you must all take part in the Nonary Game in order to escape your prison. So far, so very *Saw*.

Each character has a bracelet on their wrist that will inject them with a lethal poison if the BP (Bracelet Points) shown on it ever drops to zero. The only way you can score the 9 BP needed to escape is to vote against the other players participating in Zero's deadly game.

Players are always kept in three groups consisting of a pair and a solo, and points are scored by the two groups going into separate rooms and voting on two options: Ally or Betray. If both parties ally they score two points, if they both betray they earn no points, if one group betrays the other while the other allies then the betrayer earns three points while their opponent loses two. It's a clever take on the Prisoner's Dilemma (or a deadlier version of *Golden Balls*) and it works brilliantly.

The clever system has you agonising over every choice you make. You feel like a complete arse when you betray someone, while we've

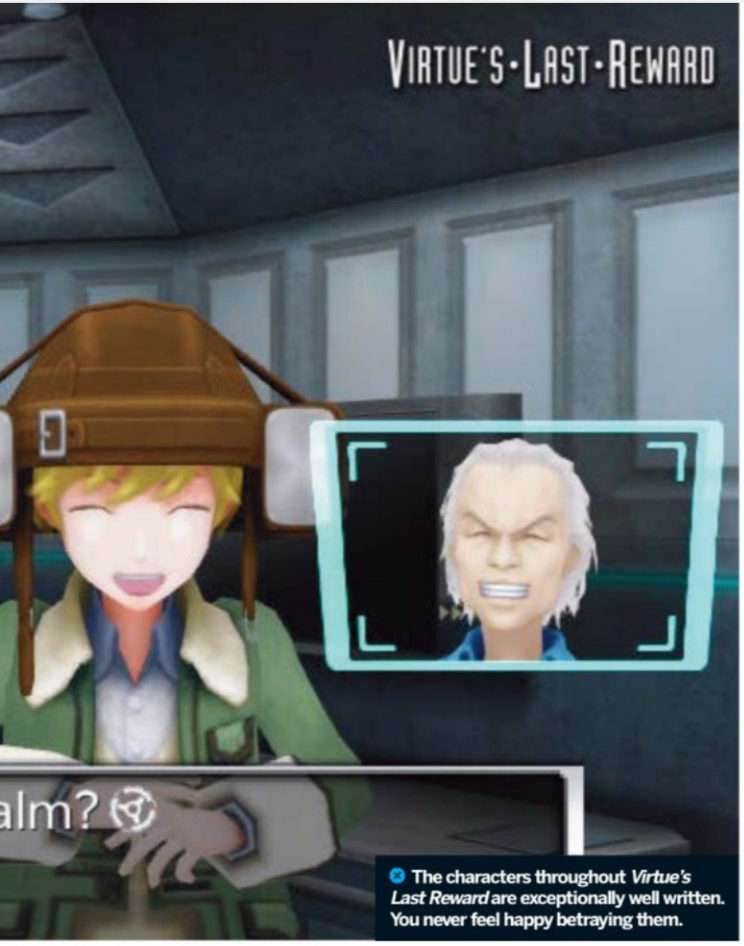


DETAILS

Publisher
Rising Star Games
Developer
ChunSoft
Price
£34.99
Players
1
Genre
Genre Puzzle/Visual Novel
Age Rating
16
Website
risingstargames.com
Twitter
@RisingStarGames
Facebook
facebook.com/RisingStarGames



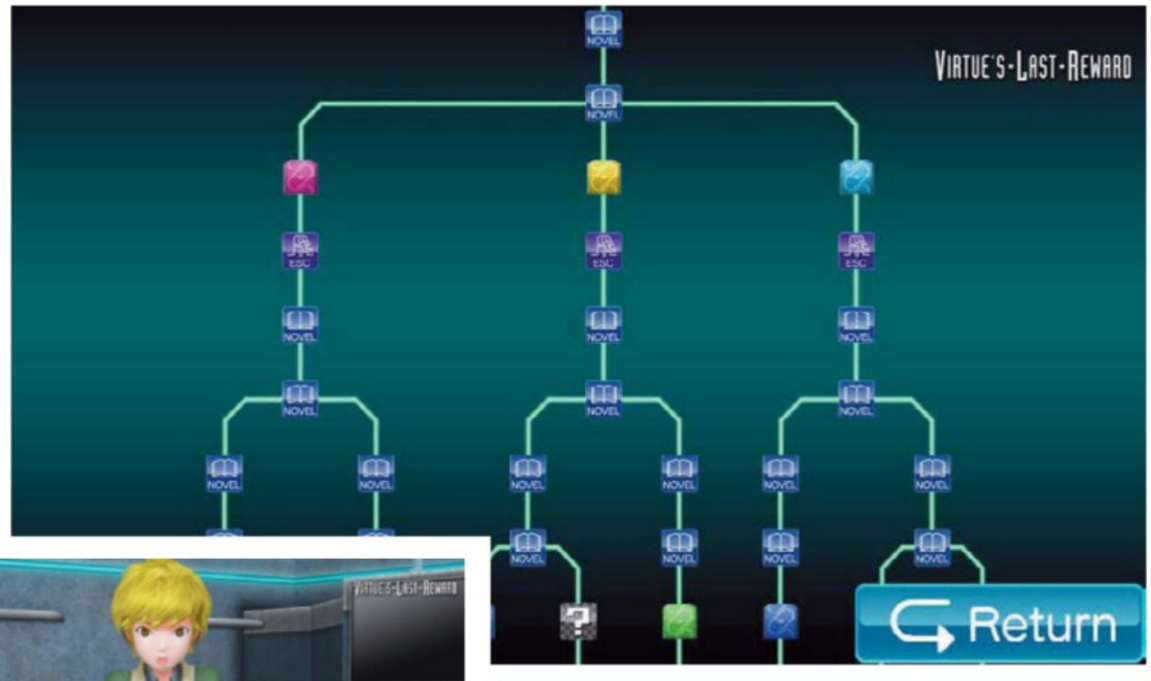
There are plenty of twists and turns and you'll often need to complete several story strands in order to see the full picture.

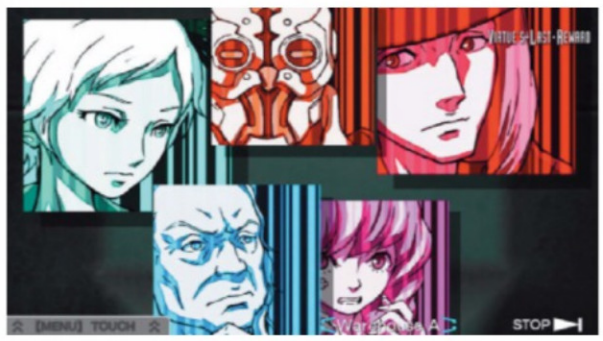


The characters throughout *Virtue's Last Reward* are exceptionally well written. You never feel happy betraying them.



Virtue's Last Reward







loudly proclaimed 'WTF?' when an apparent ally betrayed us for selfish gain. It also helps that the characters are brilliantly written (and voice acted in English should you import the US version) which adds to the moral dilemmas.

The real kicker, however, comes when you eventually finish a storyline, which typically takes around five hours. Once you reach the ending (of which there are 24) you'll once again find yourself at the game's start. Things take a turn for the surreal, though, when Sigma starts to remember things that only you as the player would know from your previous playthroughs. Deaths start to stack up, the true intentions of previous allies become painfully clear, while you'll genuinely gasp as more and more clever curveballs are thrown at you.

Virtue's Last Reward is one of the most interesting games to appear on Sony's portable, offering onion-like layers of complexity that make it stand out from other games on the system. If you're looking for a novel take on the point-and-click adventure then this should be considered as an immediate purchase.

Darran Jones

VERDICT

It's certainly not for everyone, but those that write *Virtue's Last Reward* off for being too niche or Japanese will be missing out on a genuine gem. We implore you to not be one of those gamers.

84%



There are all sorts of puzzles in *Virtue's Last Reward*. Some of them are a lot more cerebral than others.

EVERYTHING WILL FLOW

Improving the neverending story

ONE OF THE biggest complaints about *999* was the need to replay huge chunks of game in order to reach new sections. ChunSoft has listened to feedback and has included a new system called Flow, which not only shows you every undiscovered story strand, but immediately lets you jump back to previous sections so that you can make an alternate choice that will take you through a new story path. Furthermore, the game remembers every single piece of text you've already heard, allowing you to instantly skip to the parts which keeps the clever story flowing forward. It's an excellent system that allows you to simply concentrate on the narrative.



If you're not a fan of Japanese science fiction, *Virtue's Last Reward* will do little to change your opinion. One of its few faults.

In This Series



999: Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors Issue N/A
The original game in the series was only localised in America, and only on the DS, making it tricky to get hold of now. **N/A**



As with the original game, there are three levels of boost power to your drifts.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed

Sumo and Sega sitting in a tree, K.I.S.S.I.N.G.

PS3 Does anyone love Sega as much as Sumo? Judging by its latest love letter to the company that created exhilarating arcade experiences like *Space Harrier* and the clear blue skies of *OutRun*, we're guessing no.

The fan service in *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed* is quite simply spectacular and we've never seen any other game on the PS3 celebrate a series of games or characters in quite the same way. It's the little details that impress. From the unlocking of obscure characters like *Skies Of Arcadia*'s Vyse to flying around an entire stage devoted to the long-forgotten *Panzer Dragoon* franchise, Sumo uses every shiny texture and sparkly effect to create a loving homage to some of Sega's greatest games. It's a fanboy's wet dream and Sumo handles it with aplomb.

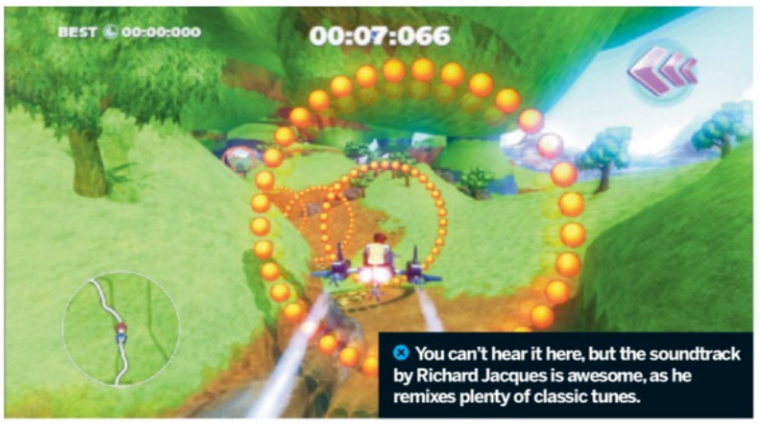
Fan service is all well and good (and it really is amazing here) but it's all for nothing if there isn't a solid game with which to back it up. Fortunately, Sumo has learned from the mistakes made in its first kart racer and has delivered all sorts of improved mechanics to ensure that this is the best kart game you can play on Sony's system.

The most obvious change over the original game – and the one that sets it apart from its peers – is the ability to transform between three distinct vehicles. Each character's ride can switch between a kart, plane and boat when they hit specific gates, and as you'd expect, the racing dynamics change completely depending on which vehicle you're using. Karting remains the best, flying is fun and agile, while only the boat parts let things down with vaguely fiddly handling.

The structure of *Transformed* is also far better than Sumo's original game, mainly due to the new World Tour mode, as well as a broader range of options to invest in. Each event awards you a set amount of stars, which in turn unlock characters and your progress. It's a nice touch, requiring you to return to the harder, more challenging difficulty levels if you want to see everything *Transformed* has to offer. The online portion is also solid with a good range of gameplay modes and a very stable connection.



The amazing *OutRun* track is only available in the limited edition version of the game.



You can't hear it here, but the soundtrack by Richard Jacques is awesome, as he remixes plenty of classic tunes.





DETAILS

Publisher
Sony
Developer
Sumo Digital
Price
£49.99
Players
1-10
Genre
Racing
Age Rating
7+
Website
www.sonicthehedgehog.com/racing/
Twitter
@SEGA_Europe
Facebook
www.facebook.com/Sega

Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed is an incredibly slick racer that oozes style and fun – it's not perfect, though, as a few little hiccups stop it from achieving classic status. Even with this little niggles it's hard not to be impressed by Sumo's superb sequel. It's the karting game all PS3 owners have been waiting for.

Darran Jones

VERDICT

Filled with loving nods to Sega's past and boasting some impressive visuals and track design, *Transformed* is an ace little racer that proves that Sumo is one of the best developers out then when it comes to creating fun driving games.

88%

Or you could try



LittleBigPlanet Karting Issue 225
A fine alternative to Sumo's game featuring the ever lovable Sackboy. **85%**

www.imagineshop.co.uk



RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Call of Duty: Black Ops Declassified

The worst possible translation of Call Of Duty to a handheld



VITA

Publisher Activision **Developer** Nihilistic Software **Price** £44.99 **Players** 1-8 **Genre** FPS **Age Rating** 16+ **Website** callofduty.com/declassified **Twitter** @CallOfDuty **Facebook** Facebook.com/CallOfDuty

We completed *Black Ops Declassified*'s campaign on a one hour and twenty-six minute train journey from Portsmouth Harbour to Bournemouth. That was with one change at Southampton Central and two bathroom breaks. Even by *Call Of Duty*'s ever-shortening standards, it's outrageously poor value, and is the shortest game we've played since *Ecco Jr* on the Mega Drive. More than that, though, it's a crushingly disappointing debut for *COD* on the Vita, one that undermines the original promise of the hardware to replicate PS3-style experiences on the go.

The campaign is divided into short burst missions that fill in the missing gaps between *Black Ops* and its recent sequel, with each mission putting you in the shoes of Alex Mason and Frank Woods, a fairly decent premise for a handheld spin-off. The problem is that these missions amount to little more than crap set-piece backwash, while the story makes no effort to really explain the point of them – you could build better levels yourself, too, as the two heroes trundle through identical corridors that could've been cribbed from any old Nineties FPS game. These 2-10 minute levels are obviously too short, but are still rife with arbitrary difficulty spikes, forcing you to redo the same horribly shit sections again and again without checkpointing.

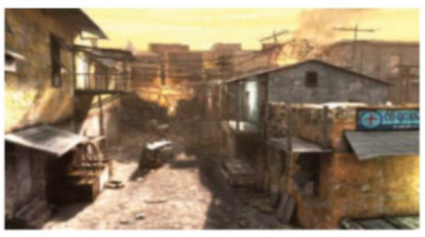
The shooting itself actually works – it's just everything surrounding this mechanic that's completely atrocious, from the truncated multiplayer maps to awful touch-screen grenade and knife controls to inconsistent AI. This is so far from the *Call Of Duty* experience that we deserve on Vita. Insulting garbage.

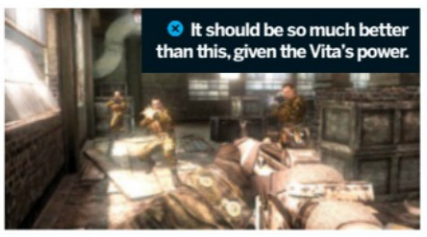
Samuel Roberts

VERDICT

So far from being a worthy FPS that it's embarrassing, *Black Ops Declassified* is the opposite of what we expected from a Vita *Call Of Duty* title. Awful value and cheaply produced – this'll remind you of the very worst PSone FPS games.

18%





It should be so much better than this, given the Vita's power.

PSN reviews





UNCHARTED: FIGHT FOR FORTUNE

Hit the deck!

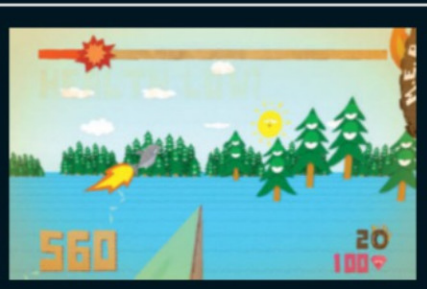
Publisher Sony **Developer** Sony Bend Studio **Price** £3.19 **Players** 1 **Genre** Puzzle

PSN

AS CARD GAMES GO, this is actually not too bad. It's an uncomplicated spin-off from the *Uncharted* series that links in with your *Golden Abyss* collectables and pushes the franchise's iconography about as far as it can go. If you've played Pokémon or Yu-Gi-Oh in the past, *Fight For Fortune* falls reasonably close to that ballpark, with character cards facing off against each other as players battle for treasure. Not especially great in the production values stakes, with a lack of 3D renders and overall excitement, it's nonetheless an ideal time-waster on Vita thanks to its very low asking price.

71%





DERRICK THE DEATHFIN

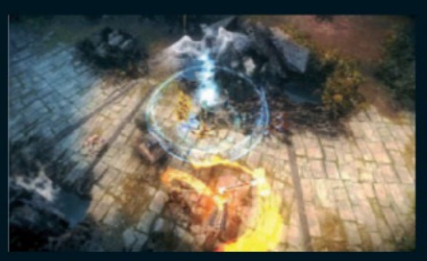
A papercraft PSN treat

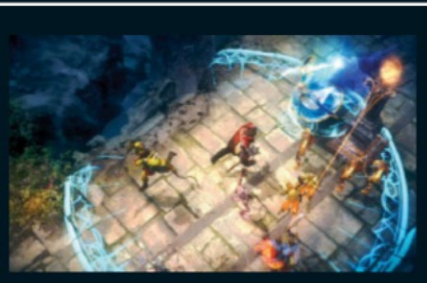
Publisher Sony **Developer** Different Tuna **Price** £5.49 **Players** 1 **Genre** Platformer

PSN

EASY TO OVERLOOK despite its gorgeous visuals, environmentalism-themed platform-racer thing *Derrick The Deathfin* is a fantastic PSN treat at a very reasonable price. Titular character Derrick basically has to eat everything to stay alive, and the levels vary in objectives, from racing to collecting to performing specific objectives, all with these lovely water-swimming physics that are wonderfully simple to get to grips with. *Derrick The Deathfin* reminds us of *Trials HD* in that you'll replay levels to get the best run possible – but the papercraft-style visuals are the real treat, automatically putting *Derrick* among the best-looking titles on PSN.

83%





GUARDIANS OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Hit PC genre comes to PS3

Publisher Warner Interactive **Developer** Monolith Productions **Price** £11.99 **Players** 1-10 **Genre** MOBA

PSN

ONE DOES NOT simply walk into Console Land with complicated controls and a steep learning curve. Synonymous with PC gaming up until this point, the MOBA genre strolls onto PSN with decently translated controls but pretty bad technical issues. A mixture of fighting game and RPG played from an RTS view, intended for online play, this takes the *LOTR* universe and ably marries it to the MOBA genre. As a result, it actually ends up being a very comfortable introduction to the genre – it's just the chronic slowdown during games that drags *Guardians* down.

79%



Alongside the special abilities there are some goofy special weapons such as Teddy and Ernie the Giant Chicken.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse



DETAILS

Publisher
Activision
Developer
Heavy Iron Studios
Price
£29.99
Players
1-4
Genre
Action/Adventure
Age Rating
16+
Website
fox.com/familyguy
Twitter
@familyguyonfox
Facebook
facebook.com/FamilyGuy

Road to nowhere

PS3

Okay, let's get this out of the way before we delve any further into this review. *Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse* serves neither gamer nor fan of Seth MacFarlane's award-winning-if-tired show. In fact, minutes into exploring Heavy Iron Studios' digital Quahog, it becomes apparent that *Back To The Multiverse* may have undone the work done by the likes of Rocksteady with Batman, and shunted licensed games back into the dark ages.

So, with that out of the way, what's this all about, then? *Back To The Multiverse*'s narrative takes its cues from the *Family Guy* series eight episode 'Road To The Multiverse', casting you as Stewie and Brian as you traverse a series of bizarre alternate worlds filled with Amish farmers, Frat Boys and familiar faces in pursuit of Stewie's evil half-brother Bertram, voiced by the brilliant Wallace Shawn.

Unfortunately, the wafer-thin narrative and anorexic campaign is utterly devoid of the series' piercing observations and trademark lewd laughs. Visually, it's horrible, the 2D charm of MacFarlane's rib-tickling telly box champion disappearing somewhere along the way in the transition to 3D. Classic gags from the show are recycled completely out of context and any sliver of original scribbling that's found its way in here is likely to cause offence.

Oh, and it's a shooter, but in the vaguest sense possible – the game's controls are annoyingly weak, and the wide selection of weaponry (pistols, lasers, flamethrowers shotguns) you'll get your hands on pack zero punch. In fact, it's incredible at just how quickly the game runs out of ideas. Once the familiar TV series intro has come to an end, the game rolls out re-spawning enemies, soul-destroying fetch quests and endless amounts of repetition. With some utterly appalling level design, terrible physics and the aforementioned imprecise controls, *Back To The Multiverse* is one of the worst tie-ins of this generation.

You would think the addition of co-op to the formula would elevate things a little... but it doesn't. *Back To The Multiverse*'s co-op and multiplayer is strictly offline, limited to small areas of certain levels and equally annoying as the solo campaign. It has got its moments – take a bow Wacky Waving Inflatable Arm Flailing Tube Man – and there are plenty of collectibles for loot lovers, but none of this makes up for the fact that *Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse* is an exercise in outdated game design and rotten insult to MacFarlane's show.

Sebastian Williamson



The campaign is short, but during it you'll venture to Quahog, set Amish farmers on fire and travel to space.

VERDICT

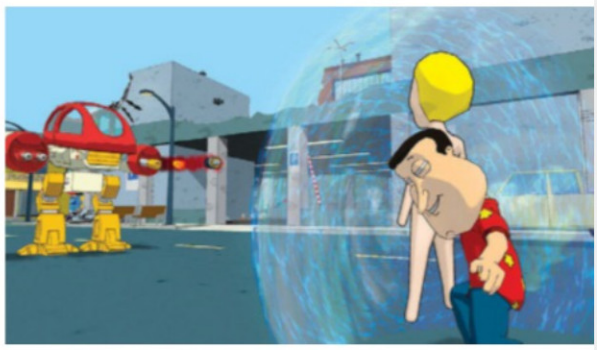
***Family Guy: Back To The Multiverse* is such an insult that it's possible Heavy Iron Studios may have shunted licensed videogames back into the dark ages by wheeling this mess of a game out to the show's fans. Avoid.**

19%



Any game that has pirates in it has got to be worth a look, right? Right?







Or you could try



Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two Issue 226
It's no masterpiece but it's a damn sight better than this nonsense. **65%**

THINK YOU KNOW XBOX?

www.x360magazine.com





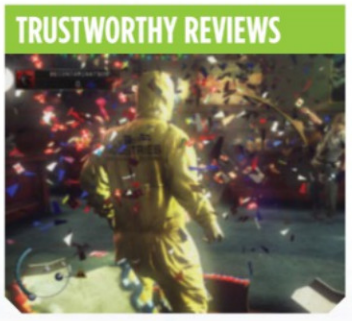
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TOP 15 PSN GAMES TO SUIT EVERY PLAYER



Whether you want an involving storyline, something to play across PS Vita and PS3, or the perfect co-op experience, PSN has something for everyone...

1



The Unmissable Interactive Story

THE WALKING DEAD: THE GAME

■ **Telltale Games** ■ **£15.99**

The Walking Dead, the episodic adventure game based on the comics of the same name, is firm proof that an interactive story can be just as good as those AAA shooters, with a thrilling plot that unfolds differently depending on the player's choices. The game has intrigue, peril, pacing, and well-developed characters that are bound to prompt a genuine emotional response, whether it's the determination to do whatever it takes to protect the protagonist's young ward, Clementine, or the hatred for some of the less amicable survivors. This is one that will be talked about for years, so make sure you don't miss out.

4



The Perfect Tower Defence Experience

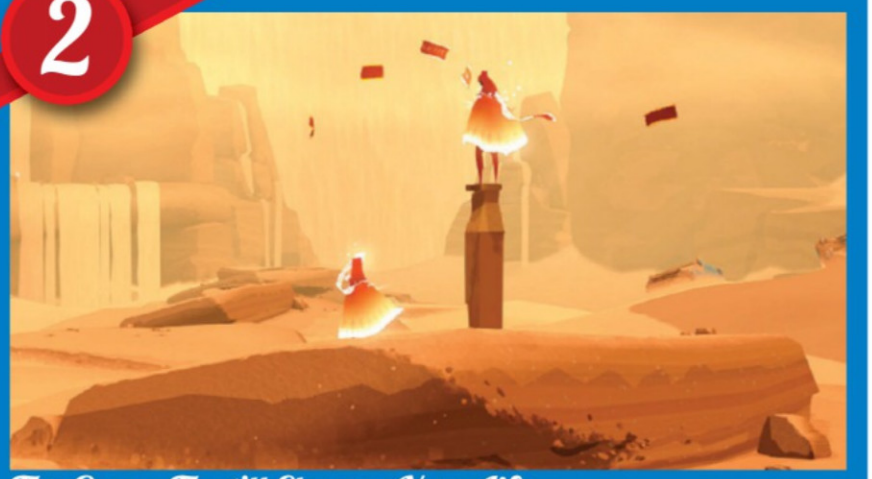
PIXELJUNK MONSTERS

■ **Q-Games** ■ **£3.99**

With its cute, colourful look and basic controls, *PixelJunk Monsters* should easily draw in newcomers to the tower defence genre. And yet, there's a good range of difficulty, with plenty of opportunity for complex tactical play that will appeal to even the most practised player of strategy games. A variety of enemies that might storm down the path to your base, and of the kinds of towers that you can use to hold them off, will encourage you to constantly change up your tactics. So despite the simple look of this one, you'll never have time to be bored.

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2



The Game That'll Change Your Life

JOURNEY

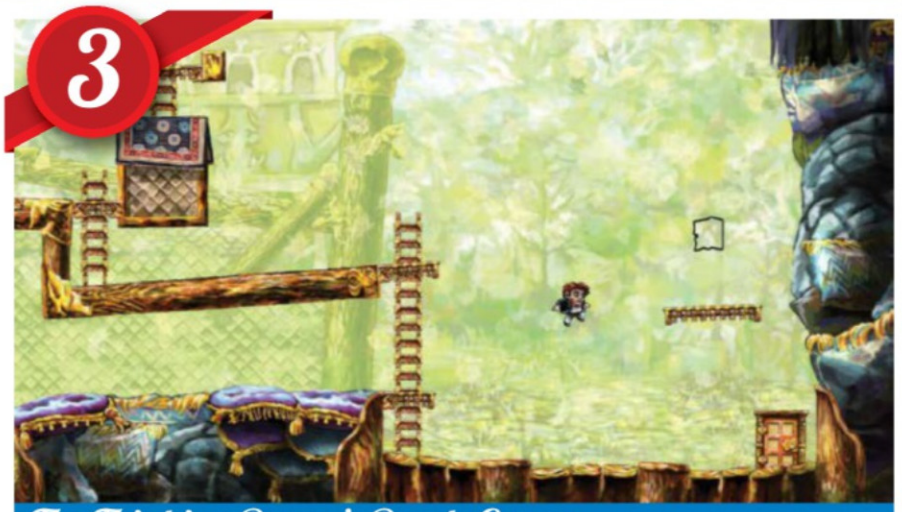
■ **thatgamecompany** ■ **£9.99**

Journey is difficult to explain, which is made obvious by the fact that its creators have settled on referring to it as an "interactive parable". You might well be drawn in by the stunning art or music, but there's more to it than that. In the way you're left to work out for yourself what to do, Journey teaches you something about game design. And from the anonymous nature

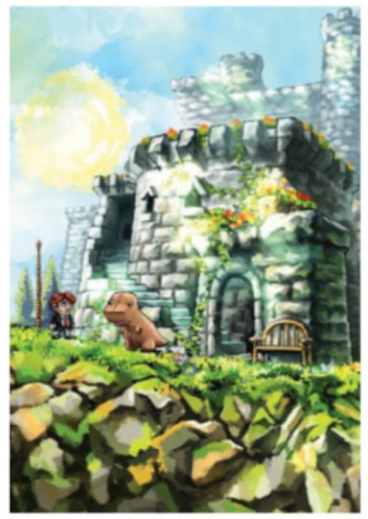


of the multiplayer (that another player might drop in at any time, codenamed and unable to shout abuse at you), it teaches you something about human interaction. Don't believe us? Just go play it.

3



The Thinking Person's Puzzle Game



BRAID

■ **Hothead Games** ■ **£7.99**

Braid is a highly acclaimed puzzle game from indie developer Hothead Games, and while some of its popularity undoubtedly comes from the aesthetic, its defining feature is the unique way the game is played. This might look like a simple platformer, but it's one in which you have the ability to rewind time, and even puzzle pros will find themselves challenged. Each world has a slightly different variation on the temporal mechanics, and the slow reveal of the plot will keep you interested. Even the traditional goal of saving the princess has a (pardon the pun) twist.

5



The Classic Racing Experience

WIPEOUT HD

■ **SCEE Studio Liverpool** ■ **£6.49**

Whoever first thought to improve on the classic racing experience by turning the cars into futuristic flying machines was a genius. The *WipEout* series has been around for a good few years now, but the thrill of the game will never get old (until we're all driving flying cars in real life, anyway). And this HD version looks incredible, even if the tracks themselves are borrowed from the PSP games. With a variety of game modes, including one in which you accelerate continuously until you crash, and both online and offline multiplayer, there's plenty here to keep any racing fan entertained.

6



The Essential HD Re-Release

OKAMI HD

■ **Clover Studio, HexaDrive** ■ **£15.99**

We may not be able to play sequel *Okamiden* on a Sony console, but at least we can play a better version of the original *Okami*. First released for the PlayStation 2 back in 2007, the enchanting adventure has now been remastered in high definition for the PlayStation 3, and it looks even more beautiful. Coming to the PS3 has also meant the addition of trophies, for those who don't see the point in playing a game unless they've got something to show for it. And given the magical "Celestial Brush", even the Move support is a good fit.

7



The Leaderboard Time Sink

ZEN PINBALL 2

■ **Zen Studios** ■ **Free**

Sometimes you just want to kick back with a simple game after work, and then look up to discover that the sun has set and you've been playing for four hours. *Zen Pinball 2* is ideal for scratching that itch. And if the addictive nature of anything to do with pinball isn't enough to keep you coming back for more, the score notifications and leaderboards should provide plenty of motivation. The best thing about this game? It's completely free. Until you get so into it that you want to buy all the downloadable content, and then you've only got yourself to blame.

8



The Artist's Dream

LIMBO

■ Playdead ■ £9.99

Limbo is a good game to bring up when you're trying to convince people that videogames are art. With its monochromatic look, any shot from the game would look quite at home in the poshest gallery. But there's more than just attractive scenery here. *Limbo* is a 2D side-scroller that tells the story of a little boy looking for his sister, travelling through dangerous environments filled with traps and other hazards to do so. It's dark, disturbing, and fairly short, but definitely worth a look, even if just so you can sound knowledgeable when the "games as art" conversation comes around.

9



The Peaceful Choice

FLOWER

■ thatgamecompany ■ £6.49

There are few games quite as Zen as *Flower*, and if you really want to relax, you couldn't find much better without actually turning off your PS3 and going for a lie down. For one thing, it's nice just to look at, as you sweep through colourful fields of rustling grass. You control the wind, and while that might sound like a bit of a power rush you only ever use it to blow petals around. The game does have objectives, and even trophies, but there's no way to actually fail at it, which really helps with the whole relaxation thing.

10



The Experimental Oddity

NOBY NOBY BOY

■ Namco Bandai ■ £3.19

Feel like every game out there is the same and they're all a bit too normal for you? Then you might want to have a look at *Noby Noby Boy*, in which you control a character called Boy by pulling his front and rear legs away from each other. Your only objective is to stretch Boy like this, while you explore various sandbox environments to collect points that can then be submitted online to another character called Girl, who uses the aggregate points from players around the world to stretch herself through the solar system. Earlier this year, she passed Uranus – feel free to make your own punchline.

11



The Point-And-Click Masterpiece

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SE: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

■ LucasArts ■ £7.99

There are undoubtedly a few good point-and-click games being made nowadays, but there's nothing wrong with enjoying a classic. Even better, this golden oldie has had a makeover, so while it still retains that early Nineties charm, it doesn't look too out of place on the PS3.

The story and puzzles are just as good as ever, and the team has even added new audio, controls, and hints. *Monkey Island 2* has actually aged quite well, and if you happen to have been born in the Nineties (or even the Noughties), this is the perfect opportunity to find out what all the fuss is about.

12



The Arcade-Style Experience

SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD: THE GAME

■ Ubisoft ■ £7.99

Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World is the cult film based on the Scott Pilgrim comic books, which in turn draw inspiration from videogames. Completing the circle, *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game* is the videogame that was released in conjunction with the film. Because of its influences, this is a game adaptation that actually works incredibly well. The retro 2D style, beat-'em-up combos, and the seven levels with their seven bosses combine to create something that looks and feels a lot like an arcade game. And, even better, you can play with up to three friends.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

13



The Nostalgic Classic

DOOM CLASSIC COMPLETE

■ **id Software** ■ **£11.99**

Doom is often named as the game that prompted the explosion of first-person shooters whose aftermath we're still dealing with today, which makes it another one of those classics that you really should try. Luckily, you can do so from the comfort of your sofa, since the PSN now hosts *Doom Classic Complete*, a collection made up of the first three games from the series (*Doom*, *Doom 2*, and *Final Doom*) with a few bonus levels thrown in. With *Doom 4* supposedly in production, it's as good a time as any to get familiar with this retro shooter that supposedly started it all.

14



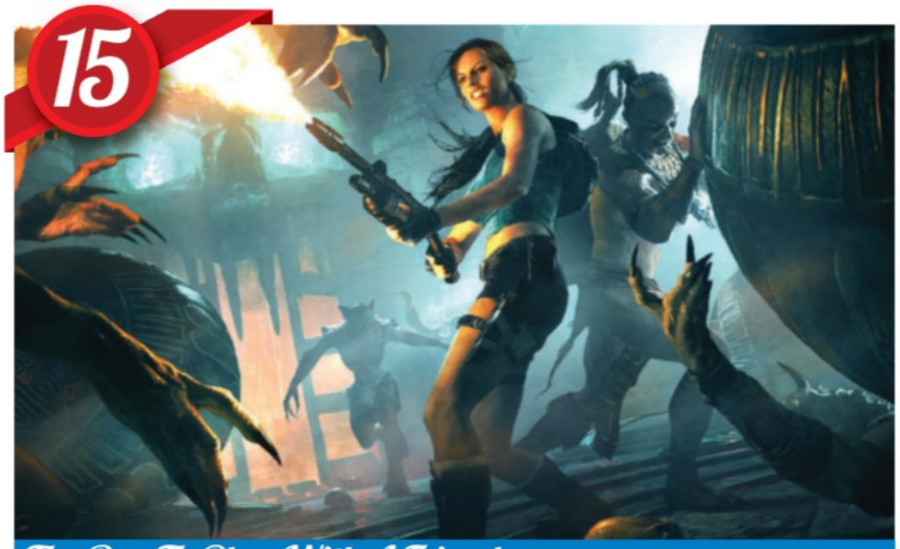
The PS3/Vita Crossplay Hit

MOTORSTORM RC

■ **Evolution Studios** ■ **£4.79**

MotorStorm RC is more than just a downsized version of *MotorStorm*. It features the same four locations but the oversized tracks are brand new. And you've still got eight styles of vehicle to choose from, even if they are remote-controlled. But best of all, it's a prime example of the PS3-to-Vita cross buy and cross play. When you buy *RC* on one console, you'll be able to pick up and play where you left off on another. And you can beat that friend who would normally thrash you by sticking them on the Vita while you race on the big screen.

15



The One To Play With A Friend

LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT

■ **Crystal Dynamics** ■ **£9.99**

Aside from the mystical setting and the protagonist herself, *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* doesn't have a whole lot in common with other titles in which the heroine stars. But that doesn't make it a bad game. The fixed perspective is reminiscent of older games, but the power of the PS3 ensures it still looks modern. You can play on your own, but with a strong co-operative mode that focuses on combining the skills of Lara and Totec – an ancient Mayan tribesman – to solve the various puzzles, it's much more fun with a friend.

TOP TEN PSN RETRO

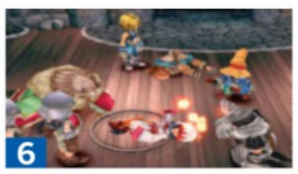

1 Metal Gear Solid


2 Resident Evil 4

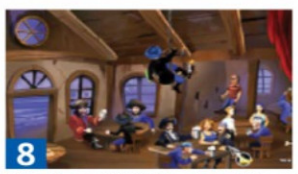

3 Okami HD


4 God Hand


5 Grand Theft Auto III


6 Final Fantasy IX


7 Streets Of Rage 2


8 The Secret Of Monkey Island



9 Driver


10 Sonic The Hedgehog 2

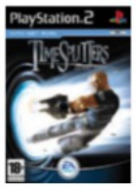
Half-forgotten classics... the games that were better than history remembers


Because, see, "It's time to split" brings in the title of the game.


Because the game is called *TimeSplitters*.



TimeSplitters: Future Perfect



• **Release date** March 2005 • **Publisher** EA • **Developer** Free Radical Design
• **Games it influenced** Crysis 2, Haze, Bulletstorm, Borderlands, Brink

THERE'S BEEN NATTERINGS in the world of where nattering happens that Crytek UK – the studio once known as Free Radical – could be allowed to release an HD version of the *TimeSplitters* trilogy should enough interest be shown in it. That, or maybe even a sequel. And it got us thinking in a very obvious, straightforward fashion: the *TimeSplitters* series was great, wasn't it?

Yes. Yes it was. And you know which one was the best? If you said *TimeSplitters 2* then, sorry, but you're deluded by rose-tinted specs. It was in fact the *third* game in the series – *Future Perfect* – that takes the crown as the best one of the splitting time adventures. Though that wordplay doesn't work so well, as the game is named after the evil timesplitter creatures and not the act of splitting time and oh we've gone cross-eyed (also: paraphrased a film from 1999).

See, *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* had everything about it that made the first and second games so great. It had the split-screen multiplayer. It had the challenges. It had monkeys. It had the level editor. But it had more than what had come before in the shape of a fun single-player mode that was actually coherent and not slapdash as it had been in previous entries to the series. Also the level editor was incredible if you had the patience to learn how to work it.

Plus the lead character Vin Diesel... wait, no – Cortez, that's the one. The main character Cortez said "It's time to split!" and it was *intentionally* cheesy, crappy and unfunny. Ah, man. British humour in games. We need more of it.

We know why *TimeSplitters 2* is held as the best in the series – it was newer at the time of its release, and it feels purer than the third game. But we will stick with this until the day we either die or change our minds: *Future Perfect* is the better game. It was flabbier, a mite too polished when compared to the haphazard presentation the series was known for and we were used to the formula third time around, so it provided no real surprises.

But then you whack it on split-screen multiplayer, with you and three mates battling bots and each other on whatever ruleset you could be bothered with. You set it to first to 300 kills, miniguns only, on the snowy level. Then you chose to play as a monkey and had hours of solid fun. While we don't mourn the death of the multitap, *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* gives us very fond memories of it.

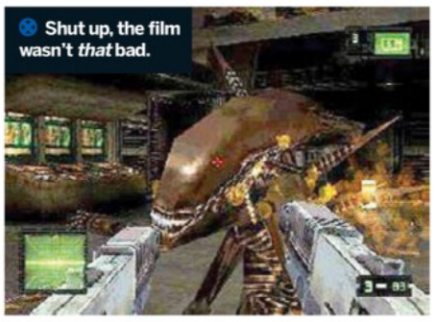
TimeSplitters 4 can't come soon enough.

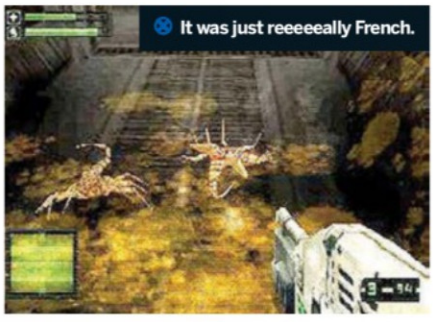
WHAT WE SAID: Issue 126 • 93%
"Awesome work from EA."


And he's saying "time" and "split" in the same sentence.









NEVER COMING TO PSN #14

Alien Resurrection



• **Release** December 2000 • **Developer** Argonaut Games

WE COMPLAIN CEASELESSLY that movie tie-ins are given no time at all to be made, such is the incessant demand that they come out day-and-date with the film they're made to promote (that's the only reason they exist; don't delude yourself into thinking otherwise). But then you get the bizarre ones – not like *The Warriors* or *The Godfather*, which were old licenses for then-new systems. No, ones like *Alien Resurrection*, that come out three years after the film.

Also ones like this have little to do with the film and, in fact, change the sort of game they were supposed to be during development. Yeah, *Alien Resurrection* was a weird one, and not just because of the (unfairly maligned (very French)) film.

When it did eventually come out on PSone, the game was... well, it was all right. Pretty good, actually. It was very atmospheric and worked well on the ageing hardware. Obviously it's aged poorly in light of it being an earlier console FPS, but on playing it recently we can confirm it does still manage to scare you. A bit. Sometimes. If you're suffering sleep deprivation and are drunk.

WE COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT

Kiss Pinball



• **Release** 25 April 2001 • **Developer** Wildfire Studios

THE MORE WE play *Zen Pinball 2* (which was a lot to begin with, so for it to be more it has to be *loads*), the more we realise that pretty much all other pinball games ever made are pointless. But there's one that rises above the rest (or falls below; we're unsure which one to go with here). One that is so very bad that it deserves to be stricken from the records and anyone who owns it deserves to be killed.

Wait, that's a bit too far. It's probably not their fault the game exists.

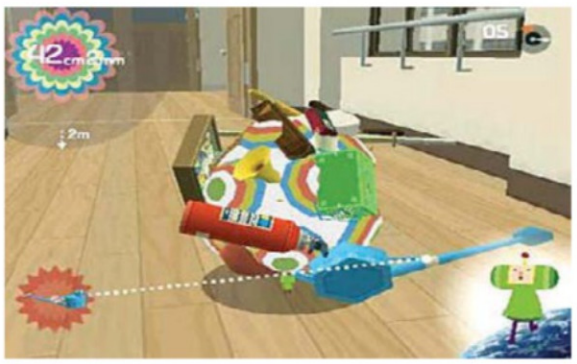
Anywho, it's *Kiss Pinball*. Which might strike you as weird, as we clearly love Kiss, because we have souls and aren't averse to a bit of 'dress up and sing stupid songs about penises'. Mainly because that's a standard Friday night for Play, RIGHT LADS?

The reason we're not talking much about the actual game here is because – and we do not mince our words – it is shit. Irredeemably so. But when Zen Studios wants to make a Kiss-themed table on *Zen Pinball 2*? Then we're back on board.



PS2 CLASSICS REVIEW





Katamari Damacy



• **Release** March 2004 (Japan)• **Developer** Namco

HEY, IT'S BEEN released on the Japanese PSN, so, like, sorry for getting your hopes up. Still – it's out there and if you have the know-how then you too can pick up the original (and possibly best) entry to the *Katamari* series out there.

In short, you are a tiny prince who has to travel the world rolling an ever-expanding ball (katamari) around and picking stuff up because your insane/brilliant/codpiecey father (the King Of All Cosmos, natch) is an arsehole who ruins everything and makes you, quite literally, pick up after his mistakes. Remember when games were madder than a lobster with no claws being flung at a church bell? *Katamari Damacy* is *of that era*.

And what do you get for your yen and hours of downloading? Well, you get something that looks a bit blurry around the edges (ah, SD), but you also get something that's unquestionably brilliant fun to play – and the purest incarnation of the *Katamari* series ever released. It's wonderful. And recommended. And oh! The music.

RETRO GAMES WE SAID WE WANT TO PLAY AGAIN BUT PROBABLY WON'T



Ape Escape

The game that legitimised analogue controls on the PSone, that brought hilarious monkeys in pants back into fashion, that provided hours of entertainment, that... we can't be bothered with right now. Ah well, maybe next year. Or not.



C&C: Red Alert Retaliation

We complain about the lack of RTSs on console, so we romanticise the past when we did get them and... then we remember. We remember the cumbersome and oafish UI. And then we go back to our FPSs and shut up.



Vigilante 8

The *Twisted Metal* reboot wasn't amazing, and it got us thinking about other games that we enjoyed shooting other cars in. Then we remembered that we don't have time to be pissing about on *Vigilante 8*, so we didn't.



King's Field

Hey there, spiritual forebear to *Demon's/Dark Souls*, how are you? Good? Yeah? Well you've aged *terribly*, so instead of showing you the respect you thoroughly deserve, we're going to ignore you. Sorry, we're just rude.

PLATINUM YOUR NEW GAMES

How do you get the most out of your Christmas gifts? By scoring those Platinum Trophies, of course. So it's just as well we've run down every Trophy collection for any games Santa might have given you for Christmas, and then we've given you the tips you need to squeeze every drop from them



ASSASSIN'S CREED III

PLATFORM: PS3

As is often the case with the *Assassin's Creed* games, it won't be too difficult to grab the whole lot of Trophies for *ACIII*. A large chunk of the Trophies will be to do with collectables or stats you can complete, so chip away at those as you play and dust them off at the end. Remember, you can buy maps for the collectables from the General Store. There are a number of different combat related Trophies too, but these are self-explanatory, so just mop them up once the game is complete. Then there's multiplayer, which isn't quite as arduous as previous *Assassin's Creed* MP Trophies. Thanks to the new Wolfpack mode you can play solo and earn up to 9,000 XP in a single match without much difficulty, and the only grinding Trophy is the one to reach Level 20 (or 127,300XP). The remaining multiplayer accolades can be unlocked with relative ease.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:





PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale

PLATFORM: PS3/PS Vita

Not only is *All-Stars* a lot of fun, but the Platinum is fairly easy. In fact, you'll get the PS Vita version of the game free, so you could in theory get two Platinums for the price of one. Bargain. All you need to do here is complete the game with every character, while making sure you use their Level 3 Supers on their own levels. So, for example, use Big Daddy's Level 3 on the *BioShock Infinite* level and Ratchet's Level 3 on the Metropolis level. Easy enough. The only tricky ones are the ones that require earning multi-kills online, but these can easily be picked up with Raiden's Level 1 Super or Toro's Level 3 (though that can be tougher to earn online).

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:





Far Cry 3

PLATFORM: PS3

Far Cry 3 has a lot of stuff to do. A lot. Luckily, most of the Trophies involve doing most of this stuff, so it's likely you won't have much difficulty vacuuming up these accolades. Take care to look at the 54 challenges needed to earn all the skills as when you complete the game – including the many outposts throughout the world – there won't be any more opportunities to earn complete and unlock these. Similarly, you'll need to make sure you complete at least one outpost without raising an alarm. Everything else is pretty self-explanatory and will come by working towards the 100%.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



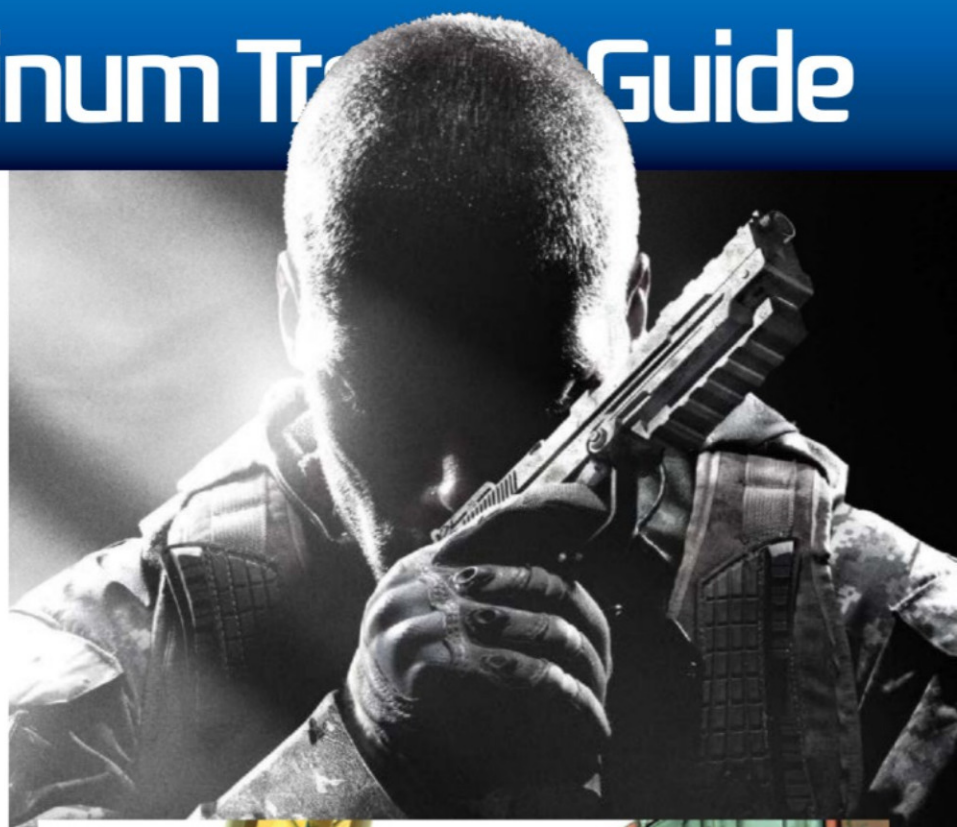


Need For Speed: Most Wanted

PLATFORM: PS3/PS Vita

Most Trophies for *Most Wanted* will come naturally, but there are a couple that'll cause you a spot of bother. Firstly, you will need at least five friends with *Most Wanted*, otherwise you won't be able to earn 'Social Climber'. For 'Kitchen Sink' you should *first* switch to a car while in pursuit (make sure it's one you've unlocked nitrous for) then race through the closest billboard. It's tricky, so it'll take practice. For 'The Heat is Off', in the centre of the map there is a long stretch of road with a railway overpass running above it. Use the small ramp in the centre of the area to access this area then drive out into the cooldown area. The police can't find you here, so you'll easily lose them. Do this for all six wanted levels and the Trophy will be yours.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:





CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS 2

PLATFORM: PS3

There's a lot of self-explanatory multiplayer and Zombies (TranZit) Trophies, but the majority are based on the campaign. You'll have to replay a couple of missions, but play the single-player on Veteran and complete the actions below and you'll have all but two of them:

MISSION 3: During the interrogation, keep pressing Square to resist killing your hostage.

MISSION 5: During the jeep escape, avoid hitting any fire in the explosions towards the end of the sequence.

MISSION 6: Kill DeFalco at the end of the mission. Don't let him escape.

MISSION 7: During the sniper section, don't kill the target. Instead, shoot him in the legs.

Before Mission 8, ensure you've completed all five Strike Force Missions. Unlike the story missions, these don't have to be done on Veteran.

MISSION 8: During the mission you'll be faced with a decision on who to shoot. Choose Square.

MISSION 9: During the mission you'll be faced with another decision; choose to shoot him in the leg.

After this, just finish the game and replay Mission 6 to let DeFalco go. Now don't complete the Strike Force Mission 'Second Chance' and you'll unlock 'Showdown' in mission 9. 'Ultimate Sacrifice' can be unlocked by pressing X instead of Square in Mission 8.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



XCOM: Enemy Unknown

PLATFORM: PS3

XCOM is a difficult game – that much is already known – but you'll need to play through it at least five times so you can work on different Trophies throughout. The five playthroughs require you to finish the game with the XCOM base in each of the five continents, so start on Normal in Brazil since that'll be the easiest and will help you get to grips with how the game works. You'll need to complete at least one game on Ironman in Classic difficulty (you could do it on Impossible but we don't recommend it at all), and while playing this mode remember that during combat the autosave doesn't kick in until after the aliens turn. If something hasn't gone your way, quit the game through the XMB and try again. Impossible will be a pain in the arse, unfortunately. Do this one last once you have enough experience to know what upgrades are worthwhile and how to tackle each map, and alternate through saves each turn. Don't be afraid to load if it all starts going to pot. Good luck.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



Ratchet & Clank: Q-Force

PLATFORM: PS3/PS Vita

If you don't have a co-op partner this will be a little more tricky since earning the additional medals after completing the game will require a fair bit of practice solo. Apart from that it's fairly simple, so instead we'll talk you through a couple of the more obscure ones. 'Hoverboot Madness' can be acquired on Korgon Refinery on the floating platforms leading to the Major Weapon Node – don't land on the moving platforms; instead double jump and glide across. If you're struggling with 'No Tank You', remember you can use Groovitrons to slow it down while you blast away. For 'A Night at the Mansion', concentrate on a swarm of Anthropods who will usually appear in enough numbers. Wait until they reach your defences then place a Transmorph Mine beneath. If it doesn't get them all, buy another mine. Once eight are there, throw a Groovitron and wait for the Trophy to pop. Remember that if you get the platinum Trophy you can use the Save Sync function in the settings to unlock a bonus second Platinum for free on your PS Vita or vice versa.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



BORDERLANDS 2

PLATFORM: PS3

You'll need to be willing to put in around 70-80 hours of gaming into *Borderlands 2* if you hope to grab this Platinum. You'll need to reach Level 50 if not for the related Trophy then the necessary skills to take on Terramorphous. There are a few vague and hidden Trophies, however, so here's how to get those:

Definitely An Italian Plumber – Donkey Mong looks like a normal Bullymong but instead throws exploding barrels. He can be found in the Eridium Blight area, spawning either to the northwest or to the east.

Tribute Of A Vault Hunter – Michael Mamaril can be found in Sanctuary wandering around town. Pre-patch he was always there, but post patch he's a little more rare. If you struggle to find him just delete the patch and play offline.

Decked Out – keep onto all your purple or orange coloured equipment (or store it in your vault) even if you outgrow them, just for this Trophy.

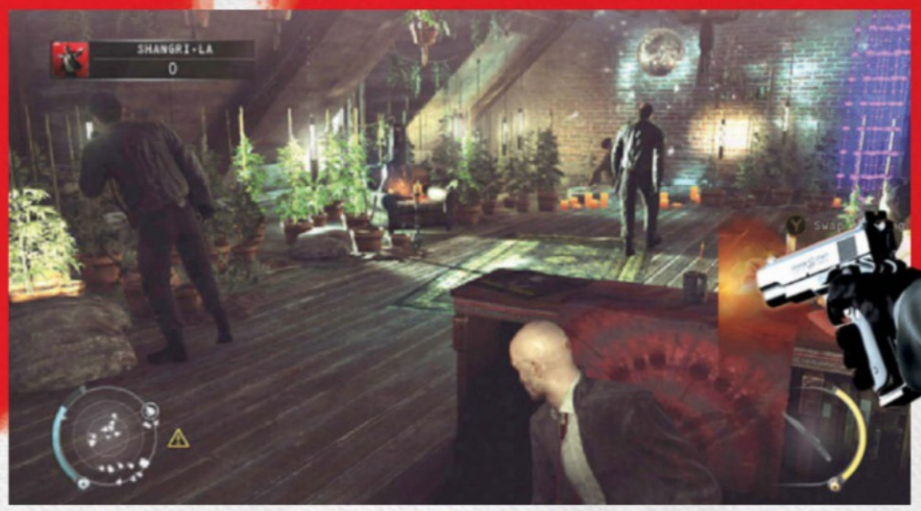
Up High, Down Low – don't worry if you miss your opportunity to high five Claptrap early on. Complete the side-mission 'Statuesque' and you'll be able to try whenever you like.

What Does It Mean? – In the Highlands you'll find a Hyperion base. Along the north side of this base is a rocky cliff that leads to a small camp. Reach this then look out to the sky to the north. Listen to Handsome Jack and watch a double rainbow appear.

World Traveler – Just make sure that every single map in the game has a white outline around it and you will have discovered all of the named locations.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:

www.imagineshop.co.uk





HITMAN: ABSOLUTION

PLATFORM: PS3

The *Hitman: Absolution* Platinum Trophy isn't too difficult. You will need to play the game on at least Hard, but that's not too tricky. Contracts Mode has a number of basic Trophies, though if you want to unlock 'Set For Life' quickly – which requires you to earn 1 million contract dollars – then just be a little picky about the contracts you attempt. Look at the leaderboards for different popular contracts and find ones that give 100,000+ (some can even give 200-250,000) and you'll gather the points in no time. It's also worth noting that 'Jack Of All Trades' seems to be glitched: any play style you unlock in the first mission will need to be earned again in another mission for this Trophy to properly unlock. Apart from that, it's easy pickings.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



Dishonored

PLATFORM: PS3

Most of the Trophies for *Dishonored* are simple enough, but you will need at least two playthroughs to get them all. Your first playthrough should be 'high chaos', where you kill every target and a lot of guards but don't unlock any other abilities beyond Blink Level 1. Complete Granny Rags and Slackjaw's side missions to unlock the additional Sokolov paintings in a later mission. The final (11th) mission will be at night-time, raining, and filled with rats: that's when you know you're in high chaos. The second should be a stealthier, less murderous approach: do not kill anyone, even Overseer Campbell, the Pendleton brothers, Lady Boyle and the Lord Regent. Also, *do not* kill the two guards that attack you in the prologue. At no point during this playthrough should you get alerted by the guards either; if you do, load an old manual save (it's a good idea to save regularly).

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:



Lego The Lord Of The Rings

PLATFORM: PS3/PS Vita

If you've ever earned a Platinum for a *Lego* game then you already know what to expect here: a lot of collectables, a lot of brick-bashing and a lot of studs. Start by playing through the game entirely, then replay through the missions on Free Play to unlock the extra minikits and hidden items. One Trophy you may want to keep an eye out for is 'That is a rare gift'. On the Amon Hen level, as Frodo you need to reach the top of the area without being spotted by Boromir, so as long as you're careful and don't step into the grass patches you should be okay. There's also a bit of a glitch to make 'We cannot linger' much easier. Instead of struggling to finish this level in 15 minutes, replay the level in story mode after finishing it the first time, skip the cut-scene then wait 30 seconds before saving and quitting. Providing the glitch hasn't been patched out, the Trophy should unlock.

PLATINUM DIFFICULTY:

PlayList

If you want to know what a game scored then these pages are for you

TEAM PICKS
SATISFYING WEEKEND GAMES



top five SAM ROBERTS

1. Dishonored
2. Ratchet & Clank: A Crack In Time
3. Red Dead Redemption
4. PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale
5. Assassin's Creed III



top five ANDY SALTER

1. The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
2. Star Wars: Dark Forces
3. Fallout 3
4. XCOM: Enemy Unknown
5. The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion



top five REBECCA RICHARDS

1. Final Fantasy VII
2. Breath Of Fire III
3. Metal Gear Solid
4. Grandia
5. Borderlands 2



top five DAN COLLINS

1. Far Cry 3
2. Okami HD
3. Virtue's Last Reward
4. Assassin's Creed III
5. God Hand

PS3 LISTING



game	issue	score
007 Legends	225	44%
3D Collection	**195**	**75%**
3D Dot Game Heroes	192	87%
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	**177**	**70%**
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	211	78%
The Adventures Of Tintin	**212**	**58%**
Afro Samurai	177	61%
Agarest: Generations Of War	**187**	**78%**
Agarest: Generations Of War 2	223	43%
Agarest: Generations Of War Zero	**209**	**52%**
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	208	58%
Alice: Madness Returns	**207**	**57%**
Aliens vs Predator	189	79%
Alone In The Dark	**173**	**70%**
Alpha Protocol	193	83%
Ape Escape	**208**	**55%**
Arcana Heart 3	207	79%
Armored Core For Answer	**173**	**65%**
Armored Core 4	153	67%
Armored Core V	**217**	**60%**
Army Of Two	164	80%
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	**188**	**65%**
Ar Tonelico Qoga: Knell Of Ar Ciel	203	27%
Ashes Cricket 2009	**183**	**30%**
Assassin's Creed	161	58%
Assassin's Creed II	**186**	**89%**
Assassin's Creed III	225	78%
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	**199**	**91%**
Assassin's Creed Revelations	**212**	**75%**
Asura's Wrath	216	67%
Atelier Rorona: The Alchemist Of Arland	**198**	**77%**
Backbreaker	193	70%
Band Hero	**187**	**68%**
Batman: Arkham Asylum	183	85%
Batman: Arkham City	**211**	**94%**
Battle Fantasia	176	67%
Battlefield: Bad Company	**168**	**78%**
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	**190**	**93%**
Battlefield 3	**212**	**88%**
Battleship	219	44%
Bayonetta*	**187**	**93%**
The Beatles: Rock Band	**184**	**96%**
Beijing 2008	**168**	**54%**
Beowulf	161	61%
Binary Domain	**216**	**70%**
Bionic Commando	179	82%
BioShock	**172**	**93%**
BioShock 2	189	88%
Birds Of Steel	**217**	**55%**
BlackSite	163	43%
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	**160**	**58%**
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	190	85%
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	**198**	**94%**
Blazing Angels	151	54%
Bleach: Soul Resurrección	**209**	**63%**
Blitz: The League II	172	67%
Blur	**193**	**86%**
Bodycount	210	54%
Borderlands	**185**	**80%**
Borderlands 2	**223**	**90%**



is an excellent lesson in sequel-making and is easily one of 2012's best games.

The Bourne Conspiracy	168	72%
Brink	**206**	**67%**
Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	171	75%
Brütal Legend	**185**	**79%**
Bulletstorm	203	86%
Burnout Paradise	**162**	**74%**
Buzz!: Quiz TV	168	82%
Buzz! Quiz World	**185**	**70%**
Call Of Duty 3	151	77%
Call Of Duty: World At War	**173**	**68%**
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	160	88%
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	**186**	**94%**
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	212	88%
Call Of Duty: Black Ops	**199**	**94%**
Call Of Duty: Black Ops II	**226**	**80%**
Call Of Juarez: Bound In Blood	181	85%
Call Of Juarez: The Cartel	**208**	**30%**
Captain America: Super Soldier	208	70%
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow	**197**	**85%**
Carnival Island	213	53%
Cars 2	**208**	**68%**
Catherine	215	61%
Champion Jockey	**210**	**50%**
Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena	178	87%
Child Of Eden	**211**	**80%**
Civilization Revolution	**168**	**90%**
Clash Of The Titans	**193**	**65%**
Clive Barker's Jericho	159	84%
The Club	**163**	**80%**
Colin McRae: DiRT	**158**	**91%**
Colin McRae: DiRT 2	**184**	**87%**
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	178	65%
Conan	**160**	**71%**
Condemned 2	165	78%
Conflict: Denied Ops	**164**	**50%**
Crash Time 4: The Syndicate	218	37%
Create	**199**	**71%**
Cross Edge	182	59%
Crysis 2	**204**	**72%**
The Cursed Crusade	211	40%
Damnation	**181**	**38%**
Damage Inc: Pacific Squadron WWII	223	37%
Dance Dance Revolution	**201**	**52%**
Dante's Inferno	189	80%
The Darkness	**154**	**91%**
The Darkness II	**215**	**76%**
Dark Sector	165	62%
Dark Souls	**211**	**90%**



Sequel to one of the hardest games in recent times, *Dark Souls* is another superb release from developer From Software.

Dark Void	188	81%
Darksiders	**188**	**83%**
Darksiders II	221	86%
DC Universe Online	**202**	**80%**
de Blob 2	203	65%
Dead Or Alive 5	**223**	**78%**
Dead Island	210	79%
Dead Rising 2	**197**	**78%**
Dead Rising 2: Off The Record	211	61%
Dead Space	**172**	**87%**
Dead Space 2	**201**	**92%**
Dead To Rights: Retribution	**192**	**68%**
Def Jam: Icon	151	79%
Def Jam Rapstar	**199**	**72%**
Demon's Souls	**193**	**92%**
Destroy All Humans!: Path Of The Furon	**178**	**29%**
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	**209**	**91%**



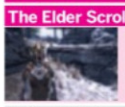
Worries: unfounded. Fun: lots of it. True *Deus Ex* experience: confirmed. Boss battles: bloody awful.

Devil May Cry 4	**163**	**89%**
Devil May Cry HD Collection	217	80%
DiRT 3	**206**	**85%**
DiRT Showdown	219	84%
Disgaea 3: Absence Of Justice	**175**	**81%**
Dishonored	**224**	**92%**



Stealth has never been so satisfying as it is in *Dishonored*. One of 2012's finest. Do the game a favour and play it sneaky.

DJ Hero	**186**	**91%**
DJ Hero 2	**198**	**88%**
Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock	220	32%
Doom 3: BFG Edition	**225**	**69%**
Dragon Age: Origins	186	82%
Dragon Age II	**203**	**86%**
Dragon Ball: Raging Blast	186	40%
Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit	**168**	**61%**
Dragon's Dogma	218	48%
Driver: San Francisco	**209**	**68%**
Duke Nukem Forever	207	33%
Dungeon Siege III	**206**	**80%**
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam	160	40%
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2	**176**	**43%**
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 3	208	56%
Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce	**189**	**37%**
Dynasty Warriors 6	164	30%
Dynasty Warriors 6: Empires	**181**	**44%**
Dynasty Warriors 7	204	32%
EA Sports Active 2	**200**	**81%**
EA Sports Grand Slam Tennis	215	75%
EA Sports MMA	**198**	**89%**
Eat Lead	178	38%
EDF: Insect Armageddon	**208**	**64%**
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	**152**	**91%**
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	**212**	**93%**



WARNING: The latest addition to Bethesda's superb franchise will seriously damage your social life.

El Shaddai: Ascension Of The Metatron	208	77%
Enchanted Arms	**152**	**69%**
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	168	60%
Enslaved: Odyssey To The West	**197**	**83%**
Epic Mickey 2: The Power Of Two	226	55%
Eternal Sonata	**176**	**87%**
Everybody's Golf 5*	158	88%
Everybody's Golf: World Tour	**165**	**91%**
Eye Of Judgment	**159**	**65%**
EyePet	185	83%
EyePet: Move	**197**	**84%**
F1 2010	197	86%
F1 2011	**211**	**71%**
F1 2012	223	79%
F1 Race Stars	**226**	**61%**
FaceBreaker	170	55%
Fairytale Fights	**186**	**51%**
Fallout 3	**173**	**97%**
Fallout: New Vegas	**198**	**88%**
Fantastic Four: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	155	39%
Far Cry 2	**172**	**74%**
Far Cry 3	226	88%
F.E.A.R.	**151**	**81%**
F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	176	87%
F.E.A.R. 3	**208**	**60%**
FIFA 08	159	84%
FIFA 09	**171**	**87%**
FIFA 10	**184**	**90%**
FIFA 11	**197**	**91%**
FIFA 12	210	86%
FIFA 13	**223**	**82%**
FIFA Street (2012)	217	74%
FIFA Street 3	**163**	**66%**
FIFA World Cup 2010	192	70%
The Fight	**199**	**42%**
Fight Night Champion	203	88%
Fight Night Round 3	**151**	**87%**
Fight Night Round 4	181	84%
Final Fantasy XIII	**190**	**85%**
Final Fantasy XIII-2	214	80%
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage	**198**	**51%**
Folklore	158	66%
Formula One Championship Edition	**151**	**72%**
Fracture	171	72%
Front Mission Evolved	**198**	**52%**
Fuel	180	49%
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	**151**	**69%**
G-Force	183	59%
Game Of Thrones	**220**	**39%**
Genji: Days Of The Blade	151	38%
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	**157**	**83%**
Ghost Recon Future Soldier	219	60%
Ghostbusters: The Videogame	**180**	**80%**
GI Joe	183	22%

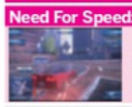
This month's new entries

The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

Call Of Duty: Black Ops II PS3	80%
Far Cry 3 PS3	88%
Epic Mickey 2: The Power Of Two PS3	55%
Wonderbook: Book Of Spells PS3	80%
Zone Of The Enders HD Collection PS3	81%
F1 Race Stars PS3	61%

game	issue	score
The Godfather	**151**	**37%**
The Godfather II	178	38%
God Of War III	**190**	**88%**
God Of War Collection*	**188**	**93%**
God Of War Collection: Volume II	**210**	**70%**
The Golden Compass	162	32%
GoldenEye 007: Reloaded	**213**	**63%**
Gran Turismo 5	200	85%
Gran Turismo 5 Prologue	**165**	**75%**
Grand Theft Auto IV	**166**	**98%**
Green Day: Rock Band	**194**	**77%**
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City	**191**	**94%**
Guitar Hero III	**160**	**90%**
Guitar Hero 5	184	81%
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	**168**	**63%**
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	182	76%
Guitar Hero Metallica	**179**	**88%**
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	189	65%
Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock	**197**	**71%**
Guitar Hero World Tour	**173**	**95%**
Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part 1	**200**	**21%**
Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part 2	208	37%
Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince	**182**	**60%**
Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix	155	32%
Haze	**167**	**64%**
Heavenly Sword	157	71%
Heavy Rain	**189**	**94%**
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	**198**	**70%**
Heroes Over Europe	184	48%
Hitman: Absolution	**225**	**93%**
 It's still a bit rough around some edges, but there's no denying the scope, intelligence and passion poured into *Hitman: Absolution*.		
Homefront	**203**	**69%**
The House Of The Dead: Overkill	212	75%
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	**207**	**59%**
Hyperdimension Neptunia	202	21%
Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs	**182**	**47%**
Ice Age 4: Continental Drift: Artic Games	222	40%
Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Classics HD	**210**	**94%**
IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds Of Prey	183	72%
The Incredible Hulk	**168**	**52%**
inFamous	180	81%
inFamous 2	**207**	**83%**
International Cricket 2010	194	61%
Inversion	**220**	**49%**
Iron Man	166	58%
Iron Man 2	**193**	**50%**
The Jak And Daxter Trilogy	216	82%
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	**187**	**59%**
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	199	63%
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	**187**	**64%**
JASF: Jane's Advanced Strike Fighters	217	30%
John Daly's ProStroke Golf	**197**	**70%**
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	159	78%
Just Cause 2	**190**	**87%**
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	160	73%
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	**196**	**71%**
Katamari Forever	184	88%
Killzone 2	**176**	**93%**
Killzone 3	202	80%
Kingdoms Of Amalur: Reckoning	**215**	**70%**
The King Of Fighters XII	182	82%
The King Of Fighters XIII	**213**	**76%**
Knights Contract	202	53%
Kung Fu Panda 2	**207**	**20%**
Kung Fu Rider	196	65%
Lair	**158**	**52%**
LA Noire	**206**	**91%**
Last Rebellion	191	42%
Legend Of Spyro: Dawn Of The Dragon	**174**	**54%**
Legendary	173	62%
Lego Batman	**173**	**65%**
Lego Batman 2	221	80%
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	**194**	**79%**
Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7	213	67%
Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	**167**	**73%**
Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	187	71%

game	issue	score
Lego Pirates Of The Caribbean	**206**	**76%**
Lego Rock Band	187	75%
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	**160**	**76%**
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	204	79%
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust	**180**	**24%**
LittleBigPlanet	**172**	**94%**
LittleBigPlanet 2	**201**	**96%**
LittleBigPlanet: Karting	225	85%
Lollipop Chainsaw	**221**	**72%**
London 2012	221	45%
The Lord Of The Rings: Aragorn's Quest	**199**	**60%**
The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest	175	52%
The Lord Of The Rings: War In The North	**213**	**42%**
Lost Planet 2	192	75%
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	**163**	**69%**
Lost: The Video Game	164	38%
Madagascar 3	**224**	**39%**
Madden NFL 07	151	82%
Madden NFL 08	**157**	**82%**
Madden NFL 09	170	83%
Madden NFL 10	**184**	**82%**
Madden NFL 11	196	84%
Madden NFL 12	**209**	**85%**
Madden NFL 13	223	86%
Mafia II	**196**	**81%**
MAG	189	68%
Majin And The Forsaken Kingdom	**199**	**72%**
Marvel vs Capcom 3	202	88%
Marvel Ultimate Alliance	**151**	**64%**
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	185	57%
Max Anarchy (Import)	**223**	**70%**
Max Payne 3	219	77%
Mass Effect 2	**201**	**97%**
Mass Effect 3	**216**	**93%**
 Despite having an arguably disappointing ending, this BioWare RPG is still a must for any serious collection.		
Medal Of Honor	198	86%
Medal Of Honor Airborne	**161**	**85%**
Medal Of Honor: Warfighter	225	72%
Medieval Moves	**213**	**47%**
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	171	78%
Metal Gear Solid 4	**167**	**92%**
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	**214**	**91%**
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	**151**	**37%**
Michael Jackson: The Experience	205	58%
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	**173**	**84%**
Mindjack	202	38%
Mini Ninjas	**184**	**80%**
Mirror's Edge	173	71%
ModNation Racers	**192**	**90%**
Monster Madness	170	78%
Mortal Kombat	**205**	**81%**
Mortal Kombat vs DC Universe	173	68%
MotoGP 08	**172**	**65%**
MotoGP 09/10	190	77%
MotoGP 10/11	**204**	**64%**
MotorStorm	**151**	**92%**
MotorStorm: Apocalypse	**203**	**76%**
MotorStorm: Pacific Rift	**172**	**93%**
Mud: FIM Motocross Championship	**217**	**50%**
MX vs ATV: Alive	206	42%
MX vs ATV Reflex	**189**	**68%**
MX vs ATV Untamed	164	58%
nail'd	**201**	**61%**
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm	174	59%
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations	**217**	**53%**
NASCAR 08	157	38%
Naughty Bear	**195**	**64%**
NBA 07	153	33%
NBA 2K7	**151**	**76%**
NBA 2K8	172	71%
NBA 2K10	**186**	**79%**
NBA 2K11	199	82%
NBA 2K12	**211**	**88%**
NBA 2K13	224	88%
NBA Jam	**200**	**68%**
NBA Live 08	158	59%

game	issue	score
NBA Live 09	**170**	**81%**
NBA Street: Homecourt	151	68%
Need For Speed Carbon	**151**	**76%**
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit	**199**	**91%**
Need For Speed: Most Wanted	**225**	**95%**
 *Need For Speed: Most Wanted* is easily the best arcade racer of this generation. We absolutely love it.		
Need For Speed ProStreet	161	86%
Need For Speed Shift	**184**	**81%**
Need For Speed: The Run	213	63%
Need For Speed Undercover	**173**	**75%**
NeverDead	215	39%
Nier	**192**	**54%**
NHL 2K7	151	80%
NHL 2K9	**172**	**67%**
NHL 2K10	186	70%
NHL 09	**170**	**88%**
NHL 10	184	85%
NHL 11	**198**	**89%**
NHL 12	210	78%
NHL 13	**223**	**74%**
Ninja Gaiden Sigma	154	88%
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2	**184**	**82%**
Ninja Gaiden 3	217	63%
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	**206**	**89%**
One Piece: Pirate Warriors	224	69%
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	**185**	**78%**
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	205	75%
The Orange Box	**161**	**93%**
Overlord: Raising Hell	167	65%
Overlord II	**181**	**68%**
Pain	183	69%
PES 2008	**159**	**70%**
PES 2009	172	80%
PES 2010	**185**	**72%**
PES 2011	197	73%
PES 2012	**210**	**74%**
Phineas & Ferb: Across The 2nd Dimension	211	66%
PixelJunk Racers	**160**	**74%**
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	225	80%
PlayStation Move Heroes	**204**	**54%**
POTC: At World's End	154	48%
Port Royale 3: Pirates & Merchants	**224**	**54%**
Portal 2	**205**	**95%**
Prince Of Persia	**174**	**83%**
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	193	68%
Prince Of Persia Trilogy	**200**	**88%**
Prison Break: The Conspiracy	191	40%
Prototype	**181**	**76%**
Prototype 2	219	75%
Puma After Hours Athletes	**214**	**58%**
Pure	171	80%
Pure Football	**194**	**69%**
Quantum Of Solace	175	57%
Quantum Theory	**197**	**29%**
Race Driver: GRID	167	85%
Racket Sports	**198**	**37%**
Rage	211	60%
Rainbow Six Vegas	**155**	**88%**
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	164	78%
Rango	**203**	**54%**
Ratchet & Clank: A Crack In Time	186	82%
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	**211**	**68%**
Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction	160	72%
Ratchet & Clank Trilogy HD	**221**	**88%**
Rayman Origins	212	80%
Red Dead Redemption	**193**	**92%**
Red Dead Redemption: Undead Nightmare	**199**	**87%**
Red Faction: Armageddon	207	62%
Red Faction: Guerrilla	**180**	**80%**
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	217	33%
Resident Evil 5	**177**	**86%**
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	190	86%
Resident Evil 6	**223**	**88%**
Resistance: Fall Of Man	151	83%
Resistance 2	**173**	**90%**
Resistance 3	210	88%
Resonance Of Fate	**191**	**79%**

**denotes import review*

TOP TEN OPEN WORLD GAMES


1 **Red Dead Redemption**


2 **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**


3 **Saints Row The Third**


4 **Grand Theft Auto IV**


5 **Sleeping Dogs**


6 **inFamous 2**


7 **Just Cause 2**


8 **Batman: Arkham City**

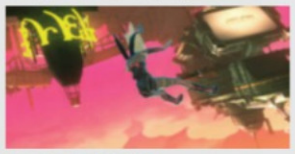

9 **LA Noire**


10 **Canis Canem Edit**

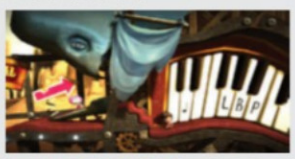
HANDHELD ESSENTIALS
MUST-HAVE VITA TITLES



UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS
Without multiplayer, it's not exactly astounding value as an experience, but nonetheless *Uncharted* has translated very well onto the PS Vita, with the lovely two sticks enabling Sony Bend to really capture Drake's essence on the handheld. Nolan North's in it, and the game's on PS Plus at the time of writing. No reason not to play it.



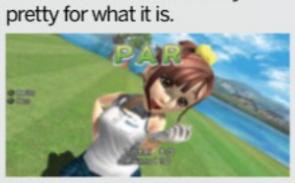
GRAVITY RUSH
A game that makes the most of the bloody hardware! That's what a Vita title should do, and unlike with the PSP, where we had to wait ages for something that demonstrated just what it could do (we're referring to *LocoRoco*, here), *Gravity Rush* shows that the console has hit the ground running with this kind of software.



LITTLEBIGPLANET
How did the best version of *LittleBigPlanet* come out on a handheld? It shows that Sony threw money at the Vita edition of *LBP*, with features that really bring the most out of the touchscreen, as well as visuals that don't feel like they've been pared down from PS3. A killer app if ever we saw one.



LUMINES ELECTRIC SYMPHONY
It just isn't a Sony handheld without Lumines, and this version is particularly fearsome in the way it'll eat your Vita's battery life. Watch those train journeys melt away with this definitive version of a puzzle classic. It's also ridiculously pretty for what it is.



EVERYBODY'S GOLF
Another one for those long, lonely journeys on trains packed with sweaty people. Accessible, lovely to look at yet perilously addictive, *Everybody's Golf* is the type of game that Sony always does so well.

game	issue	score
Ridge Racer 7	151	75%
Ridge Racer Unbounded	**217**	**67%**
Rise Of The Argonauts	176	58%
Risen 2: Dark Waters	**222**	**64%**
Rock Band	**169**	**94%**
Rock Band 2	**179**	**96%**
Rock Band 3	199	84%
Rocksmith	**223**	**78%**
Rogue Warrior	188	09%
Rugby World Cup 2011	**209**	**49%**
Rune Factory Oceans	220	51%
R.U.S.E.	**197**	**82%**
The Saboteur	187	67%
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	**180**	**76%**
Saints Row 2	172	79%
Saints Row: The Third	**211**	**88%**
SBK Generations	220	51%
Saint Seiya: Sanctuary Battle	**216**	**52%**
Saw	186	52%
Saw II: Flesh & Blood	**198**	**36%**
Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection	177	85%
SBK 08	**172**	**55%**
SBK 2011	206	70%
SBK Generations	**220**	**54%**
SBK X: Superbike World Championship	193	67%
Sega Rally	**158**	**92%**
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes	**198**	**76%**
Shadows Of The Damned	207	79%
Shaun White Skateboarding	**198**	**70%**
Shaun White Snowboarding	173	72%
Shellshock 2: Blood Trails	**177**	**32%**
Shift 2: Unleashed	204	66%
The Shoot	**199**	**76%**
Silent Hill: Downpour	217	81%
Silent Hill HD Collection	**217**	**76%**
Silent Hill: Homecoming	174	64%
The Simpsons Game	**160**	**82%**
The Sims 3	199	87%
The Sims 3: Pets	**212**	**70%**
SingStar	159	80%
SingStar Guitar	**199**	**70%**
SingStar Pop Edition	179	81%
Singularity	**195**	**80%**
Skate	159	86%
Skate 2	**175**	**82%**
Skate 3	192	86%
Sleeping Dogs	**222**	**80%**
The Sly Collection	200	84%
Sniper Elite V2	**218**	**52%**
Sniper: Ghost Warrior	206	45%
SOCOM: Special Forces	**205**	**63%**
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	190	78%
Sonic Generations	**212**	**70%**
Sonic The Hedgehog	151	52%
Sonic Unleashed	**175**	**48%**
Sorcery	219	76%
SoulCalibur IV	**169**	**94%**
SoulCalibur V	**214**	**80%**
Spec Ops: The Line	220	59%
Spider-Man 3	**155**	**33%**
Spider-Man: Edge Of Time	212	38%
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	**197**	**69%**
Spider-Man: Web Of Shadows	173	55%
Splatterhouse	**200**	**58%**
Splinter Cell Double Agent	153	79%
Split/Second: Velocity	**192**	**90%**
Sports Champions	**196**	**83%**
Sports Champions 2	225	65%
SSX	**216**	**45%**
Starhawk	219	81%
Star Ocean: The Last Hope International	**190**	**63%**
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	171	65%
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	**199**	**61%**
Start The Party!	196	72%
Stormrise	**178**	**51%**
Stranglehold	159	65%
Street Fighter IV	**176**	**95%**
Street Fighter X Tekken	217	83%
Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition	**207**	**88%**
Stuntman: Ignition	157	82%
SuperCar Challenge	**183**	**66%**
Superstars V8: Next Challenge	190	55%
Superstars V8 Racing	**181**	**63%**
Super Street Fighter IV	**191**	**90%**
Supremacy MMA	**211**	**40%**
Syndicate	216	78%
Tales Of Graces f	**222**	**77%**
Tekken 6	**184**	**94%**

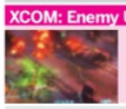
game	issue	score
Tekken Hybrid	213	79%
Tekken Tag Tournament 2	**223**	**90%**



Far from being the sideshow attraction the word 'spin-off' might suggest, *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* is actually pretty damn brilliant.

Test Drive Ferrari Racing Legends	221	60%
Test Drive Unlimited 2	**203**	**62%**
The Amazing Spider-Man	221	61%
The Testament Of Sherlock Holmes	**224**	**55%**
Thor: God Of Thunder	206	38%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	**151**	**88%**
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	158	73%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	**171**	**86%**
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	181	69%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	**194**	**60%**
Tiger Woods PGA 12: The Masters	204	65%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	**217**	**70%**
Time Crisis 4	166	69%
Time Crisis: Razing Storm	**199**	**58%**
TimeShift	162	72%
TNA Impact!	**171**	**71%**
Tom Clancy's EndWar	173	80%
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.	**177**	**75%**
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	196	69%
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Trilogy HD	**210**	**78%**
Tomb Raider Trilogy	204	86%
Tomb Raider: Underworld	**173**	**83%**
Tony Hawk's Project 8	151	85%
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	**160**	**72%**
Tony Hawk: Ride	188	52%
Top Gun: Hard Lock	**218**	**45%**
Top Spin 3	168	71%
Top Spin 4	**203**	**60%**
Tornado Outbreak	186	56%
Toy Story 3	**195**	**82%**
Transformers: Dark Of The Moon	208	64%
Transformers: Fall Of Cybertron	**223**	**73%**
Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen	182	41%
Transformers: The Game	**156**	**34%**
Transformers: War For Cybertron	194	80%
Trinity: Souls Of Zill O'll	**202**	**56%**
Trinity Universe	194	61%
Tron Evolution	**200**	**17%**
Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty	165	40%
Turok	**163**	**46%**
TV Superstars	199	53%
Twisted Metal	**216**	**68%**
Two Worlds II	203	64%
UEFA Euro 2008	**165**	**62%**
UFC Undisputed 2009	**180**	**90%**
UFC Undisputed 2010	193	88%
UFC Undisputed 3	**215**	**82%**
Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3	212	78%
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	**161**	**87%**
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves	**185**	**96%**
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception	**212**	**90%**
Unreal Tournament III	162	88%
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	**151**	**54%**
Valkyria Chronicles	173	82%
Vancouver 2010	**189**	**76%**
Vanquish	**197**	**93%**
Viking: Battle For Asgard	**165**	**74%**
Virtua Fighter 5	151	83%
Virtua Tennis 2009	**180**	**80%**
Virtua Tennis 3	**150**	**91%**
Virtua Tennis 4	**205**	**79%**
Wanted: Weapons Of Fate	179	63%
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	**210**	**51%**
Warhawk	157	84%
Warriors: Legends Of Troy	**202**	**14%**
Warriors Orochi 3	217	59%
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	**183**	**55%**
Way Of The Samurai 3	190	16%
Wet	**184**	**41%**
Wheelman	178	72%
Where The Wild Things Are	**188**	**56%**
White Knight Chronicles	190	55%
White Knight Chronicles II	**207**	**49%**
Wolfenstein	183	72%
Wonderbook: Book Of Spells	**226**	**80%**
World Snooker Championship 2007	151	56%
Worms Collection	**224**	**85%**
WRC: FIA World Rally Championship	197	76%
WRC 2: FIA World Rally Championship	**211**	**63%**
WRC 3 FIA World Rally Championship	225	75%
WSC REAL 09: World Snooker Championship	**177**	**67%**
WSC Real 11	204	69%
WWE All Stars	**204**	**82%**
WWE Legends Of WrestleMania	178	80%

game	issue	score
WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2008	**159**	**88%**
WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2009	173	74%
WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2010	**185**	**77%**
WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2011	199	63%
WWE '12	**212**	**50%**
WWE 13	225	55%
X-Blades	**178**	**54%**
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	**224**	**94%**



Thinking, planning, failing and dying is back in fashion: *XCOM* is a phenomenal reimagining of a classic title and an instant classic in its own right.

X-Men Destiny	211	35%
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	**179**	**71%**
Yakuza: Dead Souls	216	60%
Yakuza 3	**191**	**80%**
Yakuza 4	203	79%
Yoostar 2: In The Movies	**204**	**60%**
Zone Of The Enders HD Collection	226	81%

PS VITA LISTING



A-Men	**217**	**70%**
Army Corps Of Hell	217	64%
Assassin's Creed III: Liberation	**225**	**76%**
Everybody's Golf	215	86%
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift Extend	**216**	**85%**
Escape Plan	216	81%
FIFA Football	**216**	**80%**
Gravity Rush	219	86%
Hustle Kings	**216**	**81%**
LittleBigPlanet	**223**	**93%**



If the community is up to the task, *LBP PS Vita*'s create mode has massive amounts of potential.

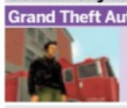
Little Deviants	215	69%
Lumines Electric Symphony	**216**	**85%**
MGS HD Collection	221	70%
ModNation Racers: Road Trip	**215**	**59%**
Mortal Kombat	219	83%
MotorStorm RC	**217**	**81%**
New Little King's Story	224	70%
Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus	**217**	**72%**
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	225	80%
Puddle	**222**	**82%**
Rayman Origins	216	84%
Reality Fighters	**215**	**52%**
Resistance: Burning Skies	219	54%
Ridge Racer	**216**	**48%**
Silent Hill: Book Of Memories	225	32%
Sound Shapes	**223**	**88%**
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Splitz	224	78%
Super Stardust Delta	**216**	**84%**
Touch My Katamari	216	83%
Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3	**216**	**80%**
Uncharted: Golden Abyss	215	83%
Unit 13	**216**	**67%**
Virtua Tennis 4: World Tour Edition	215	81%
WipEout 2048	**215**	**87%**

PS STORE LISTING



1942: Joint Strike	**170**	**74%**
3-On-3 NHL Arcade	177	62%
After Burner Climax	**193**	**91%**
Age Of Booty	**172**	**81%**
Alien Breed: Impact	196	80%
Alien Breed 2: Assault	**201**	**82%**
Alien Breed 3: Descent	204	61%
All Zombies Must Die!	**214**	**64%**
Amy	215	19%
Anarchy: Rush Hour	**194**	**73%**
Aqua Panic	193	68%
Arc The Lad	**215**	**79%**
Armageddon Riders	207	65%
Atelier Meruru: The Apprentice Of Arland	**221**	**35%**
Back To The Future: It's About Time	204	71%
The Baconing	**210**	**72%**
Battlefield 1943	182	89%
Beat Hazard Ultra	**213**	**79%**
Beat Sketcher	201	85%
Beyond Good & Evil HD	**207**	**86%**
Bishi Bashi Special!	175	61%
Bionic Commando Rearmed	**169**	**88%**

game	issue	score
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	203	61%
Blacklight: Tango Down	**200**	**64%**
Blade Kitten	197	72%
Blast Factor	**152**	**72%**
Blokus	202	54%
BloodRayne: Betrayal	**211**	**62%**
Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries Of Little Riddle Episode I	188	65%
Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries Of Little Riddle Episode II	**188**	**61%**
Blue Toad Murder Files Episodes 4/5/6	193	70%
Bomberman Ultra	**185**	**82%**
Braid	**188**	**93%**
Burn Zombie Burn	**178**	**85%**
Burnout Crash	211	79%
Call Of Duty Classic	**188**	**90%**
Calling All Cars	155	81%
Castle Crashers	**200**	**88%**
Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair	212	67%
Catan	**195**	**85%**
Chime Super Deluxe	203	80%
Comet Crash	**186**	**84%**
Comix Zone	210	62%
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	**16**	**79%**
Command & Conquer Red Alert: Retaliation	176	55%
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	**168**	**70%**
Commander's Challenge	185	68%
Command & Conquer	**175**	**44%**
Cool Boarders	173	57%
Cool Boarders 2	**175**	**31%**
Costume Quest	199	70%
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	**223**	**89%**
Crash Bandicoot	172	77%
Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped	**174**	**82%**
Crash Commando	174	80%
Crash Team Racing	**170**	**79%**
Crazy Machines Elements	210	71%
Crazy Taxi	**200**	**80%**
Crescent Pale Mist	200	70%
Critter Crunch	**188**	**91%**
Crystal Defenders	**184**	**48%**
Cubixx HD	207	76%
Dark Mist	**164**	**53%**
Dead Nation	201	86%
Dead Space: Extraction	**203**	**88%**
Dead Space: Ignition	199	47%
DeathSpank	**195**	**83%**
Destruction Derby	01	80%
.detuned	**186**	**50%**
Deus Ex	219	83%
Digger HD	**186**	**52%**
Diner Dash	190	66%
Double Dragon Neon	**224**	**37%**
Driver	**171**	**90%**
Droplitz	**184**	**91%**
Earthworm Jim HD	**196**	**89%**
Eat Them!	**202**	60%
echochrome	**169**	**85%**
echochrome II	202	83%
Elefunk	**170**	**45%**
Eufloria	212	85%
Explodemon	**203**	**70%**
Fat Princess	183	65%
Fatal Inertia EX	**168**	**65%**
FIFA 09 Ultimate Team	178	61%
Final Fight: Double Impact	**193**	**90%**
Final Fantasy VII	**181**	**96%**
Final Fantasy VIII	**190**	**90%**
Final Fantasy IX	**195**	**90%**
Flight Control HD	198	85%
Flock!	**179**	**70%**
flOw	**151**	**90%**
Flower	176	85%
Frogger: Hyper Arcade Edition	**221**	**55%**
Frogger Returns	190	35%
From Dust	**211**	**82%**
Funky Lab Rat	201	70%
G-Police	**27**	**84%**
Galaxy Fight	215	27%
Gatling Gears	**207**	**62%**
Geon	175	71%
Go! Puzzle	**152**	**58%**
God Hand	216	83%
Gotham City Impostors	**216**	**78%**
Grand Theft Auto III	**224**	**90&**



GTA III shuffles onto the slowly growing list of PSN classics, and still illustrates why Rockstar's original 3D take on the series was so influential.

Gran Turismo HD	150	75%

game	issue	score
Gravity Crash	**187**	**85%**
Greed Corp	191	75%
Greg Hastings Paintball 2	**219**	**22%**
GTI Club+	174	72%
Gundemonium Collection	**197**	**80%**
Gunstar Heroes	181	85%
Hamsterball	**194**	**72%**
Hardcore 4x4	15	81%
Hasbro Family Game Night	**187**	**60%**
Heavy Weapon	187	75%
High Velocity Bowling	**163**	**50%**
Hi-Octane	178	64%
The House Of The Dead 4	**218**	**82%**
Hustle Kings	190	87%
Hyperballoid HD	**188**	**70%**
I Am Alive	217	64%
inFamous Collection	**224**	**85%**
inFamous: Festival Of Blood	212	76%
Inferno Pool	**181**	**81%**
International Track & Field	171	80%
Interpol: The Trail Of Doctor Chaos	**185**	**48%**
Invincible Tiger: The Legend Of Han Tao	185	70%
Jet Rider 2	**176**	**71%**
Joe Danger	**194**	**96%**
Journey	**216**	**87%**
Judge Dredd	18	19%
Jumping Flash	**172**	**55%**
Jurassic Park: The Game	214	32%
Kick-Ass The Game	**194**	**60%**
KIllzone HD	225	65%
Kula World	**172**	**71%**
Kung-Fu Live	201	42%
Landit Bandit	**195**	**66%**
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light	**198**	**90%**
The Last Guy	**171**	**91%**
Lead & Gold: Gangs Of The Wild West	193	65%
Lemmings	**151**	**79%**
Limbo	**209**	**90%**
Linger In Shadows	173	69%
LocoRoco Cocoreccho!	**159**	**80%**
Lumines Supernova	**178**	**90%**
Madden NFL Arcade	**188**	**58%**
Mad Riders	220	70%
Magic Carpet	**179**	**65%**
Magic: The Gathering: Duels Of The Planeswalkers	202	84%
Magic: The Gathering: Duels Of The Planeswalkers 2012	**208**	**70%**
Marvel vs Capcom 2	**182**	**90%**
Matt Hazard: Blood Bath And Beyond	**189**	**69%**
Medal Of Honor: Frontline	210	52%
MediEvil	**173**	**45%**
Mega Man 9	172	75%
Mega Man 10	**192**	**82%**
Metal Gear Solid	**187**	**93%**
Metal Gear Solid Online	175	45%
Microbot	**202**	**51%**
Monkey Island 2: Special Edition	**195**	**94%**
Motorhead	**173**	**60%**
Namco Museum Essentials	193	60%
Naruto Shippuden: Kizuna Drive	**205**	**42%**
NBA Jam: On Fire Edition	212	64%
Nights Into Dreams...	**224**	**75%**
Noby Noby Boy	177	85%
Nucleus	**155**	**82%**
Numblast	183	60%
N20	**37**	**70%**
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD	214	86%
Okami HD	**225**	**90%**



Okami is lovely, just as we remember it, and has been given a treatment that takes it far beyond the muffled visual quality of the PS2 original.

Outland	**207**	**72%**
OutRun Online Arcade	180	80%
Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	**201**	**91%**
Payday: The Heist	**213**	**88%**
Pain	183	69%
Peggle	**189**	**94%**
Pinballistik	215	75%
PixelJunk 4am	**220**	**40%**
PixelJunk Eden	169	67%
PixelJunk Monsters	**163**	**94%**
PixelJunk Shooter	**187**	**93%**
PixelJunk Shooter 2	**204**	**90%**
PixelJunk SideScroller	**213**	**77%**
Piyotama	162	62%
Planet Minigolf	**196**	**58%**
Polar Panic	190	65%
Populous: The Beginning	**46**	**70%**

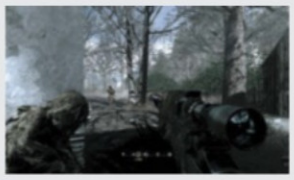
game	issue	score
Prince Of Persia Classic	173	67%
Puddle	**216**	**76%**
The Punisher: No Mercy	182	49%
Puzzle Chronicles	**194**	**70%**
Puzzle Dimension	208	81%
Puzzle Quest Galactrix	**181**	**68%**
Q*bert	58	53%
Quantum Conundrum	**221**	**90%**
Rag Doll Kung Fu: Fists Of Plastic	179	83%
Rampage: World Tour	**29**	**77%**
Rainbow Moon	221	68%
Ratchet & Clank: Quest For Booty	**170**	**69%**
Rayman	01	76%
Rayman 3 HD	**217**	**77%**
Renegade Ops	211	78%
Resident Evil 4 HD	**210**	**93%**
Resident Evil Code Veronica X	211	72%
Resident Evil Chronicles HD Collection	**221**	**82%**
Revenge Of The Wounded Dragons	191	60%
Riff: Everyday Shooter	**162**	**86%**
Risk: Factions	202	80%
Rock Band Blitz	**223**	**80%**
Rocketbirds: Hardboiled Chicken	212	82%
Rocket Knight	**194**	**74%**
Rocketmen: Axis Of Evil	165	63%
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 1	**194**	**90%**
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 2	**194**	**92%**
Sega Rally Online Arcade	208	74%
Savage Moon	**175**	**87%**
Scott Pilgrim vs The World	197	77%
The Secret Of Monkey Island SE	**195**	**92%**
Section 8	**193**	**78%**
Section 8: Prejudice	209	80%
Shank	**197**	**86%**
Shatter	183	91%
Sheep	**171**	**78%**
Shoot Many Robots	217	81%
The Simpsons: Arcade Game	**216**	**54%**
Siren Blood Curse	170	62%
Skullgirls	**218**	**88%**
Smash Cars	184	50%
SOCOM Confrontation	**178**	**55%**
Soldner-X 2: Final Prototype	195	70%
Sonic Adventure	**198**	**63%**
Sonic Adventure 2	225	69%
Sonic CD	**214**	**82%**
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I	199	82%
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode II	**220**	**40%**
Spin Jam	174	32%
Snakeball	**176**	**92%**
Stacking	203	88%
Star Trek: D-A-C	**189**	**57%**
Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dream	159	57%
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Online Edition	**209**	**92%**
Street Skater 2	**178**	**40%**
Super Puzzle Fighter II HD Turbo Remix	168	78%
Super Rub-A-Dub	**151**	**83%**
Supersonic Acrobatic Rocket-Powered Battle-Cars	177	65%
Super Stardust HD	**155**	**74%**
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix	176	72%
Switchball	**191**	**75%**
Swords And Soldiers	199	88%
Syphon Filter	**48**	**93%**
Syphon Filter 3	170	80%
Tales Of Monkey Island	**196**	**91%**
Tank Battles	186	68%
Tekken HD	**150**	**80%**
Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection Online	161	87%
Tetris	**202**	**84%**
Theme Hospital	32	80%
Theme Park	**174**	**80%**
TMNT: Turtles in Time Re-shelled	186	57%
Tokyo Jungle	**223**	**81%**
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six	54	34%
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD	**223**	**73%**
Top Darts	202	71%
Top Gun	**198**	**53%**
Topotai: Spinning Through The Worlds	183	61%
ToyHome	**162**	**31%**
Trash Panic	181	79%
Trials Of Topaq	**159**	**50%**
Trine	184	85%
Tumble	**198**	**70%**
Under Siege	207	71%
The Unfinished Swan	**225**	**78%**
Uno	189	85%
Vagrant Story	**189**	**82%**
Vandal Hearts: Flames Of Judgment	192	87%
Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown	**220**	**90%**

PS3'S BEST GAMES

COD 4: MODERN WARFARE

88%, PLAY 160

You know, we got a lot of flack back in the day on the Play forum because we gave *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* less than 90% – but we were correct. With a single-player campaign dogged by inconsistency, it deserved a slightly lower score.



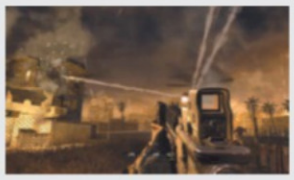
Despite that, it was obvious that *Modern Warfare*'s best moments had the kind of impact on us that no other first-person shooter could, particularly the nuclear bomb bit.



Even though it's become synonymous with idiot teenagers shouting down headsets and casual gamers, *Call Of Duty 4*'s multiplayer was still unbelievably fresh – particularly when it came to XP-based progression.



Modern Warfare took the *Call Of Duty* series into the present day for the first time. We knew it was the right move as soon as we got our hands on that tanker level at the start. It was just incredible.



Though the last third is a little weaker, its tendency to follow a less daft storyline meant that *Modern Warfare* could still have some of the heavy-hitting narrative stuff that current *Call Of Duty* titles have phased out a bit in favour of daft Michael Bay-isms.

DOWNLOAD THESE JRPG EDITION



FINAL FANTASY VIII
96%, Play 54
Final Fantasy's PSone golden age sparks a lot of debate about which of the titles is best – and each argument is totally valid. *VIII* gets a nod because of its addictive card game Triple Triad and gorgeous world.



CHRONO TRIGGER
Not reviewed
Available on the US PlayStation Store, *Chrono Trigger* is one of the greatest RPGs ever made, with an innovative time-travelling mechanic and some of the most imaginative environmental design within its genre.



CHRONO CROSS
Not reviewed
Technically a spiritual successor to *Chrono Trigger*, and also available on the US Store, *Chrono Cross* is an equally accomplished JRPG that comes from Square's greatest age on PlayStation. Weirdly, the story has almost nothing to do with the previous game, despite the similar title.



ALUNDRA
Not reviewed
One of those US releases that came out back when it was harder to get hold of import titles, *Alundra* is a solid little PSone RPG that has turned out to be a great match for Vita. It's a tad ugly now, mind.



FINAL FANTASY VII
93%, Play 127
Oh, you've probably heard of this one. *Final Fantasy VII* is one of the best games of all time, no doubt about it – from the music to the world to the story, it's eminently replayable and holds up well. You should be playing it right now.

PSP LISTING



game	issue	score
The 3rd Birthday	203	80%
300: March To Glory	**152**	**59%**
Ace Combat X	147	72%
Ace Combat: Joint Assault	**194**	**79%**
After Burner: Black Falcon	152	82%
Ape Academy 2	**145**	**52%**
Ape Escape P	140	37%
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	**190**	**45%**
Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines	187	77%
Astonishia Story	**142**	**68%**
Beaterator	186	72%
Blade Dancer: Lineage Of Light	**145**	**45%**
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger Portable	194	84%
Blood Bowl	**184**	**53%**
Bomberman	150	83%
Boulder Dash: Rocks!	**165**	**69%**
Breath Of Fire III	138	82%
Brothers In Arms: D-Day	**149**	**69%**
Burnout Dominator	153	65%
Burnout Legends	**134**	**94%**
Buzz! Brain Bender	175	68%
Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded	**147**	**80%**
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	141	72%
Cars	**143**	**60%**
Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles	163	78%
Championship Manager	**137**	**65%**
Championship Manager 2006	140	32%
Cid The Dummy	**180**	**32%**
Coded Arms	134	53%
Call Of Duty: Roads To Victory	**153**	**69%**
Colin McRae Rally 2005 Plus	134	84%
The Con	**153**	**59%**
Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	167	87%
Crush	**154**	**80%**
The Cube	153	64%
Dante's Inferno	**191**	**76%**
Dead Or Alive: Paradise	192	56%
Disgaea: Afternoon Of Darkness	**161**	**92%**
Dissidia: Final Fantasy	**184**	**60%**
Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy	203	79%
Disgaea 2: Dark Hero Days	**190**	**87%**
Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai 2	154	50%
Driver 76	**154**	**68%**
Dungeons & Dragons: Tactics	159	55%
Dungeon Siege: Throne Of Agony	**148**	**85%**
Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce	179	69%
EA Replay	**147**	**74%**
echochrome	169	85%
echoshift	**191**	**73%**
Everybody's Golf 2	167	86%
Everybody's Tennis	**195**	**88%**
Every Extend Extra	145	84%
Exit	**138**	**65%**
The Eye Of Judgment: Legends	191	57%
EyePet	**199**	**77%**
F1 2009	187	66%
Fate/Extra	**219**	**60%**
Field Commander	145	83%
FIFA 06	**136**	**43%**
FIFA 07	147	81%
FIFA 11	**198**	**69%**
FIFA World Cup 2010	193	65%
Fired Up	**134**	**60%**
Final Fantasy	164	63%
Final Fantasy III	**224**	**44%**
Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection	204	80%
Final Fantasy Tactics	**159**	**86%**
FlatOut: Head On	164	79%
Football Manager 2007	**147**	**62%**
Football Manager Handheld 2008	161	49%
Football Manager Handheld 2010	**187**	**60%**
Formula One 06	143	78%
Frantix	**136**	**36%**
Gangs Of London	144	65%
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	**157**	**42%**
Ghost Recon Predator	200	60%
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	**188**	**55%**
Ghostbusters: Sanctum Of Slime	204	51%
Gitaroo Man Lives!	**144**	**79%**
Gladiator Begins	206	52%
Go! Sudoku	**137**	**45%**
The Godfather: Mob Wars	136	66%
Gods Eater Burst	**202**	**88%**
God Of War: Chains Of Olympus	165	84%
God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta	**199**	**79%**
Gradius Collection	144	80%
Gran Turismo	**184**	**85%**
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	**185**	**95%**
GTA: Liberty City Stories	**135**	**95%**
GTA: Vice City Stories	**147**	**96%**
Half-Minute Hero	**191**	**87%**
Hard Corps: Uprising	204	78%
Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	**136**	**69%**
Hellboy: Science Of Evil	170	60%
Holy Invasion Of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do To Deserve This?	**186**	**73%**
Hot Pixel	155	73%
Indiana Jones And The Staff Of Kings	**181**	**60%**
Infected	141	68%
Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon	**154**	**70%**
International Athletics	170	40%
Invizimals	**187**	**71%**
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	59%
Juiced: Eliminator	**141**	**70%**
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	160	80%
Kao Challengers	**137**	**60%**
Killzone: Liberation	146	83%
Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep	**196**	**88%**
The Legend Of Heroes: Trails In The Sky	214	75%
Lemmings	**138**	**63%**
LittleBigPlanet	**186**	**90%**
LocoRoco	**143**	**94%**
LocoRoco 2	173	82%
LocoRoco Midnight Carnival	**186**	**81%**
Lord Of Arcana	202	65%
The Lord Of The Rings: Tactics	**136**	**66%**
Lumines II	137	74%
Madden NFL 06	**137**	**74%**
Marvel Trading Cards	155	38%
Me And My Katamari	**138**	**86%**
Medal Of Honor Heroes	147	72%
MediEvil: Resurrection	**134**	**53%**
Mercury Meltdown	145	66%
Metal Slug Anthology	**150**	**91%**
Metal Gear Ac!d 2	**138**	**92%**
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker	**193**	**92%**
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	**150**	**91%**
Miami Vice	**144**	**82%**
Micro Machines V4	142	71%
Might & Magic: Clash Of Heroes	**205**	**84%**
ModNation Racers	193	70%
Monster Hunter Freedom	**140**	**81%**
Monster Hunter Freedom 2	157	59%
Monster Hunter Freedom Unite	**181**	**77%**
Moon Diver	205	46%
MotoGP	**146**	**75%**
Motorstorm: Arctic Edge	184	72%
Mytran Wars	**179**	**85%**
Namco Museum Battle Collection	136	68%
Naruto Shippuden Legends	**185**	**46%**
Naruto Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2	169	46%
NBA Ballers: Rebound	**139**	**61%**
Need For Speed Undercover	175	57%
No Heroes Allowed	**199**	**69%**
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	**139**	**93%**
PaRappa The Rapper	155	88%
Patapon	**163**	**86%**
Patapon 2	177	87%
Patapon 3	**205**	**81%**
Patchwork Heroes	192	85%
Persona 2: Innocent Sin	**214**	**65%**
Pirates Of The Caribbean	143	52%
PixelJunk Monster Deluxe	**185**	**86%**
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	163	77%
Pocket Racers	**144**	**49%**
PoPoLoCRoIS	142	71%
Power Stone Collection	**145**	**88%**
PQ – Practical Intelligence Quotient	141	52%
Prince Of Persia Revelations	**138**	**69%**
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	194	52%
Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?	**181**	**80%**
PSN Collection: Power Pack	173	70%
PSN Collection: Puzzle Pack	**173**	**54%**
Pursuit Force	134	83%
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	**159**	**76%**
Puzzle Chronicles	190	61%
Puzzle Quest	**153**	**66%**
R-Type Tactics	170	74%
Rainbow Six Vegas	**156**	**78%**
Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters	154	78%
Red Faction: Battlegrounds	**205**	**78%**
Rengoku 2	144	72%
Resistance: Retribution	**177**	**76%**
Ridge Racer 2	145	78%
Ridge Racer	**132**	**91%**
Rock Band Unplugged	**181**	**92%**
Rocky Balboa	**150**	**68%**
Secret Agent Clank	169	79%
Sega Mega Drive Collection	**177**	**79%**
Sega Rally	**158**	**90%**
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 Portable	**206**	**78%**
Shinobido: Tales Of The Ninja	150	60%
Silent Hill Origins	**160**	**87%**
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories	190	52%
The Sims 2	**137**	**71%**
Slam Bolt Scrappers	204	73%
Smash Court Tennis	**154**	**58%**
SOCOM Fire Team 2	154	70%
SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo 3	**190**	**71%**
SOCOM: Tactical Strike	160	85%
SOCOM: US Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo	**140**	**69%**
Sonic Rivals	147	70%
Sonic Rivals 2	**162**	**35%**
SoulCalibur: Broken Destiny	**183**	**92%**
Spider-Man 3	**162**	**32%**
Spinout	149	81%
Splinter Cell: Essentials	**139**	**71%**
Split/Second: Velocity	200	71%
SSX On Tour	**138**	**76%**
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	178	78%
Star Trek: Tactical Assault	**148**	**59%**
Star Wars Battlefront II	137	74%
Star Wars Battlefront: Elite Squadron	**187**	**65%**
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	148	69%
Star Wars: Renegade Squadron	**160**	**78%**
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max	138	70%
Street Riders	**140**	**29%**
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	142	54%
Swarm	**204**	**78%**
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	**140**	**90%**
Tekken 6	**187**	**90%**
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	**143**	**92%**
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together	**202**	**81%**
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	179	71%
Tenchu: Time Of The Assassins	**146**	**51%**
TNA Impact! Cross The Line	189	58%
TOCA 3	**152**	**70%**
Tokobot	140	79%
Tomb Raider: Anniversary	**156**	**81%**
Tomb Raider: Legend	140	72%
Twisted Metal Head-On	**134**	**54%**
UFC Undisputed 2010	197	80%
Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins	**145**	**88%**
Undead Knights	189	46%
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	**140**	**59%**
Valhalla Knights	158	49%
Valkyria Chronicles 2	**196**	**87%**
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	153	78%
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	**140**	**82%**
Virtua Tennis 3	152	88%
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	**161**	**70%**
What Did I Do To Deserve This My Lord!? 2	192	78%
WipEout Pulse	**159**	**86%**
WipEout Pure	**138**	**91%**
World Of Pool	156	43%
World Tour Poker	**141**	**67%**
World Tour Soccer 2	142	40%
Worms: Open Warfare 2	**157**	**80%**
WWE SmackDown! vs Raw 2006	137	84%
WWE SmackDown! vs Raw 2007	**147**	**80%**
World Rally Championship	134	67%
Worms	**179**	**91%**
Worms 2: Armageddon	**198**	**87%**
Worms Battle Islands	201	80%
Worms Crazy Golf	**213**	**82%**
Worms: Ultimate Mayhem	217	80%
X-Men Arcade	**203**	**60%**
Yars' Revenge	206	57%
Zack Zero	**215**	**73%**
Zen Pinball 2	**224**	**90%**

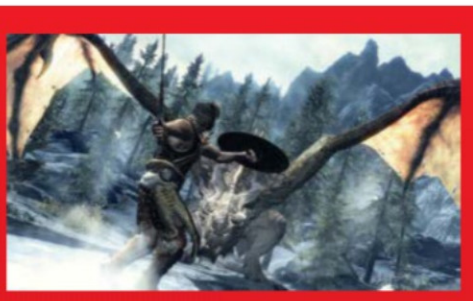


The finest pinball game we've seen in a long time, but in a newer, shinier, updatedier fashion. Yay pinball!

Zombie Apocalypse: Never Die Alone	213	69%
Zuma	**182**	**78%**

*denotes import review








ANDY SALTER

WHAT (HAVE THEY BEEN PLAYING?):

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

WHY (WAS IT CHOSEN?):

Because I'm Andy Salter

LME AND MY beard are enjoying *Skyrim*, still. After coming across the abandoned ship in that frozen lake to the North, recently, I've been scaling cliffs with aplomb, having the time of my life as I plunge hundreds more house into my *Elder Scrolls* save file. I'm not terribly bothered by the new content in Dragonborn, truth be told, as there are still many more stories to uncover throughout the land – it's simply the game you can't get bored of, and, having surrendered Christmas to its charms, I'll now do the same thing with 2013. Goodbye, 2013.

Basically, I'm going to keep playing this until the next Bethesda game comes out, which is probably going to be in 2014. Although *Dragon Age III* is likely to get here first, only Elder Scrolls has this sort of detail in world-building, and it's a hard paradigm to match for other developers. So, this is my life for now. Now nearing the 1,000-hour mark, this fantasy game offers things to me that the real world never could, such as having an excellent collection of swords and shields.

PLAYING THE PLAYLIST

It's a new year – we're going to play more games than last year for the ruddy sake of it...



SAM ROBERTS

WHAT (HAVE THEY BEEN PLAYING?):

PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS BATTLE ROYALE

WHY (WAS IT CHOSEN?):

It's the perfect Vita title

I WASN'T QUITE expecting myself to fall in love with *All-Stars* as much as I have due to the truncated roster, relatively disappointing single-player content and my overall critical feelings towards the beat-'em-up genre, but this is actually a terrific match for Sony's handheld. It's a perfectly viable PS3 game, too, but the instantaneous nature of the online multiplayer makes this a great time sink for the Vita – plus, it looks absolutely beautiful on that screen, whereas the PS3 version ends up looking a bit washed out. I'm still convinced Jak and Daxter are the ideal choices for the game, providing you're willing to endure a long and bloody scrap to the finish. My record with the two chaps is undeniably good.

Anyway, it hasn't exactly picked up a lot of traction in the UK, and that's a real shame to me – it's much more than just a *Smash Bros* clone when you spend even a small amount of time with the game. Something of a multiplayer culture surrounding *All-Stars* has built up in our office, and with DLC characters coming, hopefully it won't subside while I'm still enjoying it.





PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LIKE...



Forgotten Fads

PLAY: GUITAR HERO III

Remember when this was the big thing, and then it got annoying really quickly? You can't give away *Guitar Hero* controllers these days (we had a clearout in our office and no one cared), but if you do want to play a genuinely accomplished rhythm action game, it's still a viable choice.



Snow

PLAY: METAL GEAR SOLID

There's nothing like Alaska to make these British winter months seem pitiful. There's something satisfying about punching wolves in the face – you know, only when the wolves attack you first. The Claymores might be a bit much, though...



Wildlife

PLAY: TOKYO JUNGLE

Tokyo Jungle is blatantly a game that Charles Darwin would like (or, alternatively, Richard Dawkins). It's the best representation of animals on PlayStation that we've seen. Life is just one big beat-'em-up for your pets, believe it or not.



Dangerous Holidays

PLAY: JUST CAUSE 2

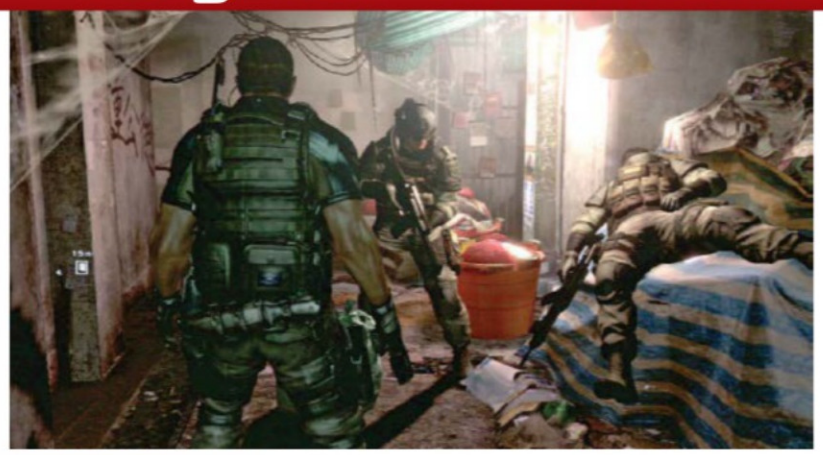
We were too poor to go on holiday this year, so we pretended we lived in the beautiful-but-vaguely-scary world of *Just Cause 2* instead. After hijacking a helicopter to the Lost island and encountering the Smoke Monster man (go find him), we chilled with a fishing boat in the sun.



Bad Sequels

PLAY: MEDAL OF HONOR: WARFIGHTER

No game came and went quite as quickly as *Medal Of Honor: Warfighter* in 2012. Despite a terrible campaign, the multiplayer really evened things out – not that anyone noticed, judging by its chart positions.







RESIDENT EVIL 6



WHAT WE SAID



■ **PLAY 223**

"Odd rough patch or misfire aside, *Resident Evil 6* is bursting with innovation, content and confidence that shows Capcom knows exactly what it's doing with its series. Now fully tooled up for co-op, this feels like a *Resident Evil* worthy of modern times."

88%

metacritic **67** out of 100

WHAT OTHERS SAID

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT RESIDENT EVIL 6? IT'S ONE OF THE MOST DIVISIVE TITLES OF RECENT TIMES – BUT WHAT DID YOU THINK?

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IAN DICKSON Aroused.

DANIEL HORKAN I liked it. A lot. Sure it was different, but it was still a fantastic game to me. Tons of content too, something not many similar games bother with any more.

JOHN MURRAY Disappointed big time. Not shit or anything, just didn't feel like a resi game to me. (the bosses should know when to stay dead too. The amount of 'oh shit he's not dead yet. Again' moments were just silly).

TONY WATSON SKELTON Pretty poor. I reckon it needs a reboot. Back to the scares of the originals with good writers and designers to help that happen.

JACQUE MARLIN Sssssshhhhhhhh!!!!!!!! Borderlands 2!!!!!!!!!!

TOM MCSHANE Indignant rage.

JOHN MURRAY Utterly, utterly wanky and unneccesary amount of QTEs too.

BAYLEY MARTIN The only thing that annoyed me is the repetitive QTEs but I did enjoy the game.

twitter
twitter.com/PlayMag_UK

@CSREYNOLDS09 The polite way to put it is "it wasn't very good". I can't publish my actual feelings.

@LOINER46 Put in around 70 hours to get the platinum, mostly co-op. Overall it was great, despite a few niggles with the camera and QTEs.

@IRGEI lots of flaws, but I think it was a great game.. way better than RE5.

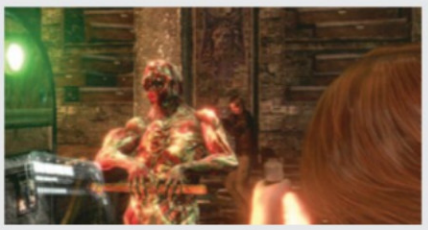
@PEPSI_PUNK spread itself too thin trying to appeal to every crowd, the best campaign was Ada and that was locked from start. Bad call.

@LEWISLITTEN It was certainly better than RE5. But only in the sense that losing one arm is better than losing two.

@KIERR_A The twitter hashtag was #nohopeleft however, they were meaning the resident evil series has no hope left.

@D3J08 I couldn't be bothered after playing the demo. Not my cup of tea I guess.

@WDANKS paid £120 for the special edt, just seen it for £50 new in same shop! Sums it up, could of been so much more.



Post-Mortem

■ We're standing behind our verdict on *Resident Evil 6*, since we've found it to be an action experience that rewards you depending on how much time you invest. With four campaigns, some inconsistency and a lot of content to get through, it takes about five hours for *Resi 6* to really get going – it's a different approach towards making a sequel than we're admittedly used to, but we'd take it over another 12-hour *Resident Evil* instalment for sure.

And as for the people who said it was worse than *Operation Raccoon City*? We don't know what you're ruddy well smoking, but stop it. That was a pile of guttertrash; *Resident Evil 6* is a rich-if-flawed experience.

What's become clear over time is that there's a hierarchy in terms of campaigns that pretty much everyone agrees with, and it goes like this (in order of quality): Ada, Leon, Chris and Jake – though the last two are interchangeable. Either way, *Resi 6* has roughly 2.5 games worth of amazing content in there. It's just the unnecessary flab that extends it beyond a natural life for the sake of value. Still, if you only have money for one game right now, why not pick it up?

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